

John 12:27-36

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"Children of Light"

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Text: *"Walk while you have the light, lest the darkness overtake you."* (John 12:35)

A week ago, yesterday, I conducted my very first Trustee tour. What's a Trustee tour, you ask? It's a time when our new Trustees get acquainted with the building and all of its major mechanical functions. We crawl into places where you wouldn't want your children to play and discover fascinating rooms containing organ pipes, or boilers, or storage space. This year, I thought it especially important for them to see the steeple; from the inside out. Naturally, we needed to see it because of all the remodeling we need to accomplish up there in the future. We went into the attic and turned on the lights, but the row of lights which illuminate the path to the steeple was out. Nevertheless, I chose to forge on. To walk to the steeple all one needs to do is walk along two parallel boards. Stay on those and you're fine. Step to the side and it's a thirty-five foot drop into the sanctuary. All we had to do was put out of our minds the fact that we couldn't see the boards very well. Did I also happen to mention that John Strassburger was, at that very moment, delivering a funeral right here in the nave? As we began our journey toward the steeple, I could hear John's voice through the speakers. *"The Lord is my shepherd...even though I walk through the valley of the shadow...thou art with me."* A little voice inside my head said, *"I hope so, Lord, I hope so!"*

There was a light at the end of the attic. Natural light, actually, emanating from the base of the steeple. I kept looking at that light, focusing on it, and in seeing it, realized our goal. It reminded me of the kind of light people describe who have near death experiences. A bright light at the end of a long, dark, tunnel. That light guided us toward our tour of the steeple and, ultimately, to a little safer environment. It was then that my mind wandered (not too far away, for I worried of falling) to the writings of John Bunyon from his work *Pilgrim's Progress*: *"Then said Evangelist, pointing with his finger over a very wide field, Do you see yonder Wicket-gate? The man said, No. Then said the other, Do you see yonder shining light? He said, I think I do. Then said Evangelist, Keep that light in your eye, and go up directly thereto, so shalt thou see the*

gate; at which, when thou knockest, it shall be told thee what thou shalt do." It should be noted that all the Trustees are safely down from the attic; I didn't leave any up there. It should also be noted that it isn't unusual for ministers to have significant spiritual experiences even when giving Trustee tours.

So, I ask you, members of First Congregational Church, "*Do you see yonder shining light?*" If so, it is the light in which Jesus described as a place where we should walk. A direction to go. A place to be. It is the kind of light which illuminates our uncertain paths and guides us beyond the dangers near our footfalls. It is the light which shines on the road less traveled. Jesus is clear about our responsibilities. If we are in the darkness we ought to move into the light lest the darkness overcomes us. If we are in the light we need to stay there and continue walking in its hopeful radiance. The question begs: What is the light? In the Gospel of John, Jesus claims, many times over using different metaphors, "*I am the light of the world.*" The purpose of his light is to shed truth and reveal what it is we're really about as a people and a church.

After my parents moved out into the "country" over twenty years ago, my brother and I would often get together with the neighborhood gang of kids and play one of our favorite games. Flashlight tag. The surroundings were perfect. Open fields, dense woods, and a kettle-moraine topography which lent itself perfectly to the rules and tactics of the game. Flashlight tag is a lot like "hide-and-seek." The difference is that flashlight tag is always played at night over a rather large territory and the person who's "it" needs only to tag you with the beam of their flashlight. Hence, the object of the game is to stay out of the light before you reach the safety of the goal. The goal happened to be the flagpole in my parent's front yard. What that meant was, in order to make it to the pole, one had to be stealthy, sneaky, and manipulate their environment for the purposes of victory. The truth of their whereabouts was kept secret at almost all costs. It was difficult to successfully reach the flagpole and the rare victory would be held up in story until at least the next evening's games.

Hiding in the darkness for a game is alright; in fact it's fun. We've all done it in our childhoods. But, in real life to hide our whereabouts behind the truth, or to manipulate our environment to avoid detection is serious and dangerous to our spiritual livelihoods. We have continued the game, only now, the stakes are much, much

higher. Jesus sets the true believers apart in that he admonishes us to walk in the light of God's truth. Yet that does not make even the strongest Christian immune to the temptations of hiding behind our own versions of truth and trying to escape the pursuit of God's will for our lives. Daniel Webster said, *"If we say the darkness shall cover us, in the darkness as in the light our obligations are yet with us."* Yes, our obligations are still with us. Whether standing in darkness or light, we are called as a people and as a church to live in the light; that is, to follow God's will. That is our obligation. To stand at the gate and knock, and ask, and to be let in.

It is time for us, both as individuals and as a church, to begin trying to find the promising rays of God's light. What kind of lives, personal and corporate, are lives which are illumined? A beginning to an answer to that question would be lives which voluntarily become dominated by the will of God. The opposite to that would be like this: *"...a ruler asked [Jesus], 'Good teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' And Jesus said to him..., 'You know the commandments'...And [the ruler] said, 'All these I have observed from my youth.' And when Jesus heard it, he said to him, 'One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.' But when [the ruler] heard this he became sad, for he was very rich. Jesus looking at him said, 'How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God.'" (Luke 18:18-24).* The ruler could have lived in the light of God had he been willing to let go of his dearest possessions. Think about the difference between his successful "worldly" life and the eternally rich life Jesus was offering him. What is that difference? It's hard for us to know, because we're so often caught up in our worldly endeavors - those dark hiding places we're so familiar with - that we experience, only in the rarest moments, true life in the Spirit. Living in the light means God first. Being called children of light means we are first in God.

In a few moments, we will join together in the sacrament of the Lord's supper. It has many different meanings for many people, but most basic among them is the meaning of renewal. Through this, the new covenant brought by Christ, we can find the grace from God to let us out of our hiding places and move us toward truth in the Spirit. Communion, together today, will not bring our lives, nor our church, to the promised land we hope for, but it will help begin our healing and, in small steps, move us toward our goal of living more fully in God's realm. James Lane Allen penned these appropriate

lines, "By degrees the comforting light of what you may actually do and be in an imperfect world will shine close to you and all around you, more and more. It is this that will lead you never to perfection, but always toward it."

A walk in God's light. A procession toward a promised treasure more worthy than we are able to describe. This is not the illusion. We're all too familiar with the illusions created in our darkened world. Reality is revealed through God's everlasting light. We are the children of light and today as we take of the Lord's supper together, let us renew our relationship with God, with each other, and with our divine, light giving, ministry to the world. Amen.