

Date: January 16, 2022 (Epiphany 2)

1. Texts: Isaiah 62:1-5; Ps 36:5-10; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; John 2:1-11.
2. Subject: discipleship.
3. Topic: outcomes of genuine discipleship.
4. Aim: encourage, challenge.
5. Proposition: "When we live as Christ's disciples, our world is changed."

BE CAREFUL HOW YOU PRAY

It can be dangerous to pray. After all, what might happen if God actually answered our prayers with a thunderous "Yes! Let's do this!"

Almighty God,
your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ
is the light of the world.
May your people,
illuminated by your word and sacraments,
shine with the radiance of his glory,
that he may be known, worshipped, and obeyed
to the ends of the earth;
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.¹

If God were to answer this prayer like Captain Jean-Luc Picard of "Star Trek" fame— "Make it so, Number One" —then we and our world would be changed, transformed, even.

Ok, so let's think aloud about this collect.

Jesus is the "light of the world". This we know, "for the Bible tells us so." And, for the most part, we have some understanding of what this means.

It means, for example, that Jesus serves us as the standard for justice, righteousness and love. His truth and compassion enlighten our paths and guide our decisions. He shows us how to live the life of God inside time, space and human experience. He is the light of our world.

¹ "The Collect for the Second Sunday after Epiphany", *The Book of Alternative Services*, The Anglican Church of Canada, Toronto, 1985, p. 349.

Jesus is also the light of the whole world, even though the majority of the world's population does not recognize this. Humankind's inability to recognize him as God, Saviour and Lord has no impact on his existence as God, Saviour and Lord. He is the light of this world.

We accept this truth because we stand in a faith relationship with Jesus. We have made Jesus *our* light in *our* world. Because of this we can recognize the light of Christ shining in and through both scripture and sacrament. This may seem a little odd, but it is just as true as the statement that "Jesus is the light of the world."

You see, the Bible is the authoritative and normative library of God's dealings with his Chosen People, the Jews. Because we know Jesus as the light of the world, we accept the Bible as authoritative and normative. We give it the power to set the standards for our faith and its practice. Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the authors, editors and entire community banded together to share God's words and insights. In scripture we are privileged to see God working in and through his people to achieve his goals for our world.

In the sacraments we are privileged not only to see God bursting into our world, but to actually experience his intervention in spirit and in truth. The sacraments are the outward and visible signs of God's inward and spiritual realities, and as disciples we can appropriate—absorb, if you want—those realities for ourselves. The sacraments are not just symbols for us. They are the actual thing they symbolize and we can appropriate them by faith.

Jesus is the light of our world and that light is transmitted to us disciples through scripture and sacraments. But the light does not just stay in us. We become like "glow-in-the-dark" letters from some child's toy. We absorb the light of Christ into our own lives and then pass it on to others who can experience it even when all else is dark around them. By faith through grace we become scripture and sacrament for others. We shine with the glory of God flowing through us. We are, as the collect says, "illumined by [God's] word and sacraments" so that others may also perceive them and God. We will proclaim Christ in word and deed, and others will experience him in spirit and in truth.

Once they experience the fullness of Christ through us, then they will come to know, worship and obey Christ, just as we are doing.

Now you can see the danger of prayer. Once we have prayed such a collect, we are obligated to making ourselves open to God's "Yes! Make it so." If we have prayed, then we must be willing to be the channel through which God answers prayer.

And, if this sermon has come in its standard place, we have already prayed this collect. We have already placed ourselves in a predicament. We have prayed and so have obligated ourselves to being used by God to fulfill our prayer. We have chosen to see Jesus Christ as the light of our world. We have been illumined by his word and sacraments over the decades. So, now, we need to release our spiritual limitations and barriers so that we may shine with God's own justice, righteousness, compassion and forgiveness. When people look at us, we are obligated to show them Christ.

Make it so, Lord our God, make it so. And so we pray:

Almighty God,
 your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ
 is the light of the world.
 May your people,
 illumined by your word and sacraments,
 shine with the radiance of his glory,
 that he may be known, worshipped, and obeyed
 to the ends of the earth;
 who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
 one God, now and for ever.

And so we say, "Amen and amen. Let it be."