

**Synod Assembly Sermon
For Aug. 29th Closing Worship
+Bishop Thomas M. Aitken**

Greetings dear Synod: in the name of God our Creator, Jesus our Lord, and the Holy Spirit, our courage and our strength. Hear again, the bold statement from Jesus in today's Gospel:

You are the Light of the world!

How is it that Jesus, the true Light of the world claimed those disciples on the hill as the Light of the World? And you, dear synod, his followers today, how is it that he claims that YOU, are the Light of the World? Are we that important? How did Jesus' title get to be ours?

What does it mean? The word "Light" is used in Scripture as Love. Light is used by Jesus to refer to God's way of love or God's Reign you could say. You embody God's love for the world; it is in fact your real identity, since it comes from the lips of the Son of God, God's Messiah.

When two different and totally competing frameworks for the purpose of life collide, we need to understand what our true framework is, and that it comes from God. Jesus claims to know this framework and claims us for God's purpose. We are not orphans, set adrift in a sea of uncertainty about the purpose of our lives. God revealed through Jesus and through Scripture what this purpose is. It is embodied in Christ Crucified and Risen for the life of the world. I believe this is the most important priority we, as Christians, must trust, and live into. Otherwise we will forever be fighting over this social issue or that, and miss the whole reason God calls us to engage in them.

It's a beautiful world God made. But it's a world of crisis too. I'll call it a three-fold crisis.

1-A Covid-19 Pandemic Crisis

2- A Climate Crisis

3- Crisis of Meaning. This one is a big crisis, and is the one that is linked to all other crises. I'm going to say that racism and white privilege and violence are particularly the current crisis of meaning and at the root of so many of our crises today. And Jesus Christ dares to say to us right in the middle of all of this: "You are the Light of the World"

Please notice we are to be light to this world, not the light of heaven. There's plenty of light in heaven already: Brightly shining angles, the saints in light, Cherubim, bright lamps, and as the final book of the bible says about Heaven: "there is no need for the sun or stars, for I saw the Lamb of God and his face was like the sun shining with full force"

Living and sharing our identity, the Light of Christ, is not for heaven, but here, in the middle of all that life brings us, both good and bad. It's such an awesome truth – we find it easier sometimes to pretend we didn't hear it!

But we did hear it. Jesus says today to you and me: **“You are the Light of the World.....A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lamp stand and it gives light to all in the house.”** When Jesus calls you, “The Light of the world,” it’s God’s plan for your life and trumps your and my plans. A light has been given to us through our baptism into him and this life is a life style of sacrificial love for everyone. Jesus does not define you as a Democrat or Republican but as God’s Light of love. **“You are the Light of the World.”** You really are! It’s not a God-suggestion. It’s a promise, and a promise depends on the One who gives it. It’s not one of many “alternative” life purposes that Jesus died and rose for. He has not made himself available as side dish in some “All you can Eat” restaurant. No, he claims us, for bringing the Reign of God’s justice and love to the here and now. Don’t hide or cover up the Light God has given you. Our Country stands at a profound moment of need of this light that conquers hate, fear and complacency.

God’s light is in you during this Covid-19 Pandemic means acting on behalf of your neighbor: Wearing masks in public, safe distancing, and being smart about entering buildings. The world needs the light and love of Christ in our current reckoning of white supremacy and racism to fight against centuries of lies and hatred. The light inside you that knows repentance and actions are required for God’s reign to be practiced. Dismantling white supremacy from the church and culture will be the most vital, difficult, and salutary work we do because it has detached us from our true identity and the core life and teachings of Christ, our Head. **‘Do not be amazed’** Jesus said to his disciples, when they heard the truth of Jesus’ claims over the evil in their day: **‘You know how to read the signs in the sky – how is it you cannot read the signs of the times.’****‘Come to me, learn from me, take on my work. Do not be afraid.’**

You already know, Christian, that Jesus clashes with kingdoms, puppet Governors and kings like greedy Herod, and every sinful scheme. In every century, God’s values have clashed with worldly values. Sometimes the church has been that light of God’s values, and sometimes, as we all know, we have not. But Jesus does not give up on us. Ever. The Christ light that you don’t hide, the love of God you share through your deeds, exposes the evil in the world and in us. You and I are far from perfect. When Luther spoke theologically of the “the “happy exchange” he was saying: You give Jesus everything you are: Your fears, your evil intentions, your good intentions, your love for others, your lack of love for others, your whimsical personality, your apathy/ boredom, and Jesus gives you his forgiveness, his patience, kindness, love and grace, and yes, COURAGE. “. In our Epistle Lesson today, Ephesians chapter one, it says: **‘(God) chose us in Christ* before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love.so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you”**

I no longer say I'm NOT a racist. The 'eyes of my heart have been enlightened.' I am racist in that I have benefited from a lie and lived comfortably in it. What is that lie? That white people are superior over all others. It's embedded in the DNA of my past, and I know it. But huge door has opened up in my soul – one I cannot close but want the light of Christ to keep opening. The church, the Body of Christ on earth is to be communities of Jesus that nurture life changing relationships with God one another, and the world.

We will not return, as congregations, synod, as church, to some "golden years" of the past, but we will, pray God, take the light of Christ in us into the streets and into God's future. I hope that we will trust that helpful Lutheran theological truth from Scripture that we are both saint and sinner, and that God wants to use our goodness, and our flaws, for God's purposes, to bless the world. I hope the scandal of God's unconditional love for all people, a love that sent him to crucifixion, and then resurrection as God's vindication over evil will become the shining light in our lives, with a power so great that we will:

Claim the gospel's promise for all people, dare to stand up against evil in our society, help people find faith in Christ and through him - hope and life in Christian community, We will renew our commitment to condemning the Doctrine of Discovery and do relationship-building with our Native neighbors through Together Here and our Anti Racism Team. Jesus' work is our work, his love, our love. In the words of Kaj Munk, a Danish Lutheran pastor, assassinated by the Nazis in WWII for his bold carrying of Christ's light against that evil: "Remember the signs of the Christian Church have been" 1-Lion, 2-Lamb, 3-the Dove, and 4-The Fish, but never the *Chameleon!*

God was not looking for someone perfect to be the Light. God was looking for you. And found you. Trust Jesus. Trust the Scriptures; Trust the Holy Spirit in you.
Carry your Light: To the Glory of God, and the good of your neighbor.

In name of the Father, and of the +Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.