



Sunday 16th March
Jesus said, 'I Am' learning to trust in truth.
I am the light of the world.
John 8: 12-20

We are called to Worship.

Welcome

Good morning and welcome to Portstewart Presbyterian Church, if you are visiting with us, we hope you have already been made to feel welcome as we worship our Lord and Saviour together.

It seems like an age since I have led worship, between being in Ballywillan, the PW service and Wesley taking our service last week. Thank you to everyone who has helped to lead us over these last weeks. Thank you as well to Stanley and John who have covered for me while I had to be in Ballywillan. The good news, or at least I hope it is good news, is that the vacancy in Ballywillan has now been filled and so I won't be disappearing off once a month anymore!

Announcements

All of the announcements are in your dairy – thanks to everyone who helped and supported the GB yesterday, please do remember the Sperrin Choir on Saturday. Also, there is no prayer and praise this evening – instead, we are going to Terrace Row for a presbytery mission service led by the Moderator of the General Assembly, Rev Richard Murray. The service starts at 7:00 pm and so I suggest that we would meet at the hall at 6:30 so as we can travel together... please do plan to come along to that it should be a good evening.

Samantha is going to come and say something about this Friday night.

Death Notice

It is with sadness that I have to announce the death of **Elizabeth McClements**, better known as Betty. Betty was a proud Scot, she was born in **Holytown** outside Glasgow. She met her husband Jimmy at a family wedding, his brother was marrying her cousin. The pair lived in Scotland until 1977 and Jimmy took a job as a prison officer at Magilligan and so the family moved to Lever Park in Portstewart.

Betty and Jimmy had three children, Ian, Scot and Leigh. Ian died in 1988, and the heartache came to Betty again when Jimmy died in 2003. Betty was a great singer, she sang in a band and was offered a tour in Canada but turned it down because she didn't want to leave Jimmy.

She worked as a nurse in the old Hopefield Hospital before moving into the Coleraine Hospital. She had a wicked sense of humour, and she loved her family – especially her grandchildren.

After a long battle against illness, Betty died on Tuesday of last week, her funeral was on Friday from her home in Portrush. She is survived by her son Scot and daughter Leigh as well as the wider family circle.

Let's pray:

Father, we do thank you for the life of Betty McClements. Thank you for every part of her character that reflected your image. Thank you for the love she had for her family. We pray for Scott and Leigh this morning, as well as the wider family circle. Lord, may they know your comfort by understanding who Jesus is. This we ask in his name and for your glory, amen.

Call to Worship

Ps 18:28; 139:12; 36:9

This morning, we are continuing our series on the **I am** sayings. The strap line for this series is **learning to trust in truth**. The idea being that we use Lent to learn some of the things that Jesus said about himself, this isn't just to improve our knowledge, but as we approach Easter, we find ourselves in a better place to trust Jesus. This morning, we are thinking about Jesus being the light of the world. Scripture describes sin, its effects and consequences as darkness, a darkness that stops us from seeing who God is and knowing who we are. Crucially this darkness is broken by the light of God. Listen to what the psalms say about the light in the darkness.

You, Lord, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light. (Ps 18:28)

Even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you. (Ps 139:12)

For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light. (Ps 36:9)

We continue with this theme of light as we stand to sing our opening praise, shine Jesus shine and light of the world.

Opening Praise

Sine Jesus Shine
Light of the world

Opening Prayer

Father, on a morning when we seek to know ourselves better by knowing more of you, we thank you that Jesus is the light of the world, that it is through Jesus, we know you and so we can know ourselves. In getting to know Jesus, in learning to live in his light we turn to scripture. The Apostle Paul said this: **The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.** (Romans 8:16) As we pray, hear what the Lord would say to us:

Oh, my daughters and sons, I so want you to realise you're no longer slaves or orphans but my totally and greatly beloved children. By the same Spirit I spoke the world into existence, and with the same Spirit I anointed my prophets and kings, I have sealed you and now indwell you.

Listen to my Spirit. He is gently and persistently serenading you – singing the Good News of your adoption, declaring the freedom of your redemption, regaling the greatness of my affection. I am the Father you always wanted. No other father could be to you what I am. I have redeemed your past, I am engaged in your present, and I have secured your future. Be still and know that I am God. Be still and know that I am good. Be glad and call me Abba Father.

The prophet Jeremiah tells us: **I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the wilderness.** (Jeremiah 2:2)

I am jealous for your heart, my beloved. I redeemed you because I love and want you for myself. I remember the joy you felt when I first called you by name and poured my grace upon you. Your first love was an aroma of praise, a delight to my heart. Do you remember those days – their sweetness, freedom, and peace?

Yet the battle for your heart continues. Guard your heart, my beloved, and be careful not to give your affection to other suitors. Your great enemy has lost you for eternity, yet he remains committed to wooing you away from me. Know his schemes and be wise. He comes to steal, kill, and destroy. I have come to give you life in abundance and myself without reservation.

The prophet Isaiah said to us: **Fear not; you will no longer live in shame. Don't be afraid; there is no more disgrace for you.** (Isaiah 54:4)

No more, my child, no more is shame your prison, home, or name. You have no reason to hide, no need to fear, no cause to blame yourself or anyone. The weight of your guilt is lifted; the power of your shame is broken; the doubts in your hearts are groundless.

When I see you, I see the perfection of my Son – for I have hidden your life in his. My grace has more than replaced your disgrace, for Jesus fulfilled the law for you and exhausted its judgement against you. I have raised you to newness of life and have given you a new heart and new name, a perfect record and a sure future.

Though the devil accuses you, people deride you, and your own thoughts indict you, I declare you to be righteous in my sight – known and desired, welcome and enjoyed. Believe it and believe it even more.

Father, we thank you for the light of Christ that enables us to see who we are in him. Thank you, Lord, we are all the things we have heard this morning, but we are conscious that we are only these things because of Jesus. So, Lord, at the very outset of our service this morning, we say that our trust is in him, in Jesus alone and we thank you for his light. Amen.

We hear from God's Word

Reading

John 8: 12-20

Emma Stockman

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'

The Pharisees challenged him, 'Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid.'

Jesus answered, 'Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going. You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one.'

But if I do judge, my decisions are true, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is true.

I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me.'

Then they asked him, 'Where is your father?'

'You do not know me or my Father,' Jesus replied. 'If you knew me, you would know my Father also.' He spoke these words while teaching in the temple courts near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized him, because his hour had not yet come. John 8: 12-20

Praise

His glory and my good

Sermon

I am the light of the world.

We live in a world that asks more questions about identity, who we are and why we are here, than ever before. We used to talk about people wanting to find themselves, this was all about our purpose. Why are we here, what are we to do with our lives. This question was about finding meaning in life. Today the questions over identity are much more about how other people see us. Discussions around pronouns and gender; at their heart are about the image we project and how we would like to be seen and known.

When **Jesus said, 'I am the light of the world...'** he was telling us that if we want to be able to properly answer all of our questions around identity then we need to understand who we are through the light of Jesus, we need to see ourselves as he sees us.

Throughout John's gospel Jesus is described as light, and he is contrasted to the rest of the world which is described as darkness or night. At the very outset of the gospel John wrote this: ***In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*** (John 1:4-5)

To understand what John is saying about Jesus and what Jesus is saying about himself we need to go back through the history of Scripture.

We know that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and, on the earth, he created a garden, and, in that garden, he created humanity, male and female, Adam and Eve. It was an incredible place for them to live. This was a place of beauty and peace, a place where work was a pleasure, it was a place where they literally lived with God. We know that the Garden was a place where God enjoyed walking in the cool of the day. (Genesis 3:8)

In every sense this was a garden filled with light, and that light was life for Adam and Eve (remember what John said, ***in him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.***) In the garden of light, there was no death, only life and this all stemmed from this incredibly close relationship that everything enjoyed with God; he walked in the garden, among his creation and with his people.

Everything in the garden was good for as long as Adam and Eve remained obedient to God. God had said you have free reign to rule and subdue this garden. You have access to everything, except the trees in the centre, do not eat from those trees. If you eat from those trees, you will certainly die. (Genesis 2:17)

We know the story, we have heard it many times before, the serpent in twisting the truth did enough to convince Adam and Eve to eat what was forbidden. Something very significant happened at that moment. Up until then the relationship with God had been built on trust and obedience. God said be obedient to me because by being obedient you show that you trust me; you trust that I know what is best for you.

Once Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they were saying they no longer trusted God and so that relationship was broken. The relationship that brought light and life lay in pieces and so darkness and death entered the world. This had a profound effect on how Adam and Eve saw themselves and how they saw God.

Up until that point, Adam and Eve were naked and happy. It was natural, there was no shame or embarrassment. Once they stopped trusting God, they became very aware of their nakedness, and they were both ashamed and embarrassed. How they saw God also changed, because instead of walking with him and enjoying his company, suddenly they were afraid and hid from him.

It was as though the lights had suddenly been turned out and so they could no longer see properly, everything became distorted, shadows became frightening, the darkness brought fear.

I hope you can see how this pattern has continued throughout the whole of history. Ever since we have worried about how we look, been embarrassed about our bodies, wanted to change

our appearance, we have tried to cover ourselves up (not just our nakedness, but the distorted opinion we have of ourselves, our shape, size – everything about us we mask and hide behind one thing or another).

Our view of God has also become distorted. We fear him and hide from him (society hides by trying to convince us that he does not exist, we hide by staying away from church, keeping our bibles closed. We are embarrassed to talk about him, certainly naming the name of Jesus makes us uneasy). This is all because we are in the dark and everything is distorted.

When Jesus said, '***I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.***' (John 8:12) He was saying the answer to how you see yourself, the way to overcome all of that embarrassment and fear, the place to find answers to the questions about who you are, what you are, they are found in me because if you can understand me, you will understand God and if you understand God, you will understand yourself.

All of the confusion, all of the fear, all of the uncertainty about who we are and our place in this world comes from the fact that we stopped trusting God, we stopped trusting God because we allowed the darkness to encroach in our lives and so we stopped being able to see God properly.

When we look at Jesus, we see God. We see a God who loves us, a God who sees us scrambling about in the dark, lost and afraid and so he came to us in the person of Jesus Christ, he came to bring light that would ease our fears. We see a God who, no matter what we think of ourselves, thinks enough of us to die for us. We see a God who places incredible value on each one of us.

Jesus was saying, live in this light, the light of what God is saying about you, the light of how God loves you and you come to this light by coming to me. Trust me, and you are trusting God. Listen to me and you are listening to God. Believe me, and you are believing God. ***I am the light of the world.***

How do we see ourselves and how do we see God? Have we a distorted view of our physical appearance? Do we spend all of our energy on trying to change not only how we think others see us, but how we see ourselves – diets, clothes and fashion?

What about the expectations we place on ourselves? Do we believe that what we achieve in life, grades in school, promotion in work, the expectations that others place on us – are these the things we think will give us value and meaning?

What about some of those bigger questions of identity that are being asked today. If only we were something else, if only we were more feminine, more masculine, if we could change our appearance and be known as something else, then we would be happier, then we would be able to accept ourselves, be comfortable in ourselves.

The problem with changing any of these things is that none of them change who we are. The only things that change are outward things, it really is like changing the colour of our clothes, or the wallpaper in our rooms – because underneath and where it matters, we are still the same people. That hasn't changed.

How do we see God? Is he someone who looks at us and sees the same things we see. Do imagine God to be the sort of person who wishes we were something more, different, better?

God has these huge expectations of us which we know we don't meet and so we have only ever imagined he is disappointed with us.

All of this, how we view ourselves, how we see God, it all stems from the fact that we are living in this darkness of a fallen sinful world and so our view of everything is distorted.

The invitation is that we would come to Jesus, into his light in order that we would see ourselves and God more clearly. In the light of Jesus, we may still be all those things we listed a minute ago. We may still struggle with how we look, or how we think others see us, we may still live with the expectations we and others place on us, we may still wish that we were more feminine or masculine – living in the light of Christ doesn't magically remove all of those things, but what it does is allow us to see that these things are not the things that give us value and meaning.

In the light of Christ, we are accepted and loved. In the light of Christ, we realise that achievement, appearance, gender – none of these impacts on that incredible sense of belonging and peace that we find in Christ. The light of Christ exposes all those things as the false hopes, false promises that they are.

In the light of Christ God is no longer disappointed in us, but he delights in us because in the light of Jesus we see how he has redeemed us and loved us. We see a love that is not dependent on what we do or what we achieve, but a love based entirely on Jesus.

So, this morning we are being called, invited, welcomed into the presence of Jesus, the light of the world so that we don't have to be afraid, embarrassed, or disappointed in who we are because in the light of Christ we see who Jesus is and what he has done for us. Let's live in the light.

We respond to God's word.

Praise I the Lord of sea and sky.

Family Reading 1 John 3:1

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! 1 John 3:1

Family Talk

This morning, we have been thinking about Jesus being the light of the world. Jesus actually said, ***I am the light of the world.*** Why do we need light.

- Portstewart Light House
- Inishowen Light House
- Torch light
- Mirror Light

Why would we need a light on a mirror – to help us see who we are, what we look like.

Jesus said I am the light of the world. He helps us to see who we are. There will be times when we think that all we do is disappoint people. There might even be times when people tell us that because we've done something wrong that we will always be bad. Jesus said he was the light of the world because he helps us to see we are something else. The bible tells us we are children of God. It doesn't matter what we have done, or who we are... when we trust in Jesus we are children of God. That is who we are. So, that's what I want you to remember today... Jesus says we are children of God.

This is so important I want us to remember this verse.

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!
And that is what we are! 1 John 3:1

Family Praise Shine

Prayers (Lord's Prayer)

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come; they will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever, amen.

We are Sent Out to Serve in God's World

Praise I heard the voice of Jesus say.

Charge to the People 1 John 1:5

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.

Benediction

Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us, both now and for evermore, amen.