

Light of the World

(Sermon by Cheryl Williams, preached at Footscray Baptist on February 8th, 2026, (Matthew 5:13-20 & Isaiah 58:1-12))

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This week I sat in the oratory at the Community of Transfiguration and not for the first time I noticed the light coming through one of the windows casting a shadow in the shape of Christ at the front. I started to think about light and shadows. I recalled also a line from a Leonard Cohen song – the cracks are where the light gets in. Is it in the darkness that we most notice the light? Is it in suffering that we begin to notice the light?

For the last couple of months, it seems we have heard the phrase ‘the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot put it out’. It seems politicians, media, all kinds of people are uttering the phrase, and our readings this morning, I think provide an opportunity for us to explore what this means.

As Christians we talk and sing about Jesus being the ‘light of the world’ and today we hear him telling those listening, ‘you are the light of the world’, but what do we mean when we say this?

The bible is full of statements and images about light. Today in our reading from Isaiah we hear of how one’s light shall arise and gloom decrease. How – stop pointing the finger at others, remove the burdens from others, feed the hungry and help those who are in pain.

In John’s gospel at the very beginning, in what is a passage that summarises the whole gospel and indeed the life of Jesus says

‘...in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.’ (John 1:5-5)

It then goes on to talk about how John came to witness and testify to the light. And then continues:

‘The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.’ (John 1:9)
Then we read in the first letter of John:

‘...that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; ⁷ but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.’ (1 John 1:5b – 7)

And now in Matthew we read that You are the light of the world, yous, all of you, are the light of the world and as such please don’t hide that light, but let it shine so others will not just see the good you do, but, ultimately give glory to God.

So, what is light? What does light do?

Lighthouses are an example of the importance of what light can be and do. They shed light onto the water, helping ships navigate and find their way, helping them avoid rocks and being shipwrecked. They just stand on the shoreline, still and strong, shining their light, in order, to assist others.

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Lamps, at least the one on my bedside table, enables me to easily find my way in the middle of the night, it enables me to read at night.

A torch can help us find our way outside when all is dark, just a small light can make all the difference.

Light gives clarity, enables sight, guides, takes away fear and makes a big difference in the dark. Jesus says you are the light of the world and no-one hides light under a table, they let it shine.

Light enables us to see. Light disperses the shadows. Light illuminates the path. Light overcomes darkness. Light enables us to search for that which is hidden. Darkness cannot put it out. The only thing that will stop it, is, if we chose to hide it in a basket.

Light though needs darkness. Annie Dillard writes “You do not have to sit outside in the dark. If, however, you want to look at the stars, you will find that darkness is necessary.”¹ In order for the light to be seen, we must be willing to go where the darkness exists, to engage and walk through it, so that, in time, the light can overcome it.

We know only too well that there is much darkness in the world, the conflict in Myanmar has been going for five years, thousands have been killed in Gaza and thousands more displaced, the conflict in Ukraine continues, tens of thousands have just in a short time been killed as they protest for their freedom in Iran, famine exists in parts of Africa, politics seems to be on a slippery slope, the President of USA seems to think it is okay to post pictures of his predecessor depicted as an ‘ape’, an Australian thinks it is okay to throw a homemade bomb into a crowd of indigenous people and others exercising their right to protest, innocent people are killed at a beach, politicians say horrendous things about their opponents, people in this country are hungry and homeless, some men continue to kill their female partners, others think it is okay to traffic drugs that bring only misery to others, need I go on? There is much darkness and cruelty that exists in our world.

It is into this world we are called to be light. What would it mean to be light? Ultimately it would mean to follow Jesus and the example he sets before us – to love, to accept, and to stand up for others. To not be silent when injustice exists, but to stand up for others, to not remain silent. To forgive, to break down any barriers that divide. To feed the hungry, house the homeless and clothe the naked.

Let us leave this place today committing to shed light where it is needed, to bring into the light all that leads to the suffering and injustice that others experience, to say no to racism, sexism and any kind of hatred and intolerance.

Let us leave this place today committing to shedding light so that the shadows of shame, abuse and cruelty will be dispersed.

Let us leave this place today committed to protecting and guiding others safely through the storms of life by shining a light on their path.

¹ From ‘Feasting on the Word – Year A’, Matthew 5:13-20, Pastoral Perspective by Charles James Cook p.336

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Let us leave this place committed to sharing the light of God's love, daring to make a difference in order to bring honour to God and living who Jesus says we are – light for the world.

Let me conclude with a prayer they say at the Community of Transfiguration

Light of the world, we stand before you.

You call us out of darkness into your marvelous light.

Light that floods and transfigures every cell of our being. Amen.