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January 22, 2006
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The Call of the Light **John 8: 12**

Though my boys would have preferred a later tee time, I treated them to the extended pleasure of seeing a magnificent sunrise a couple of days after Christmas, as we traveled Interstate 65, heading south from Birmingham on an early morning when the stars still shimmered. The air was chilled, the grass was crunchy, the world around us was covered in a sheet of white. As we traveled, we were treated to the first sight of light, a faint orange tinge upon the violet horizon; then the peekaboo tip of an orange orb, which soon became like a bright golf ball on an insubstantial lie. I know scientists describe day differently, but to the human eye the sun *rises*. It rose that day before us, and we witnessed the power of its warmth. The light touched but one side of the road and there the earth shone, throwing off its icy crust in a resurrecting mist. On the road's other side, darkness reigned: the world remained chilled, sleeping, slumbering, covered in a death-like patina of frost. Once the light was everywhere, the entire earth beamed, radiant with a touch of glory. It was as if all creation was called to life. As the old spiritual exclaimed, "My Lord, what a morning!"

Sunrise is a parable of the Light of Christ upon our lives. Our Lord declares, **"I am the Light of the World, and he who follows me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the Light of life."** On the one hand, we enjoy a sort of existence, a kind of life. But when the Light of Christ shines upon us, our soul experiences an empowering warmth. Suddenly powers of caring are unfrozen; suddenly powers of understanding are expanded; suddenly boundaries of acceptance are extended. We become more alive! When the Light of Christ shines on us, suddenly, hatreds become intolerable, prejudices become unacceptable. There are times when our lives are dull, dark, chilled and slumbering; then the Light of Christ falls upon our being and we discover avenues of spiritual opportunity and wellsprings of spiritual energy that we had not imagined heretofore. We are called to a higher realm of living.

Ah, Dr. Kremer, such sentiments sound lofty, even poetic – yet they are somewhat out of touch with real life. Do not think this for a moment. If the metaphor of the Light is not a reality in our lives, then we do not understand the narrative of our existence, we cannot understand the narrative of all creation. I state the matter starkly:
if there is a Light of the world that calls us to higher plane of living,
if there is a Light that awakens within us possibilities that we could not have otherwise envisioned, then we accept a basic fact about ourselves and our creation:
we are not what we can be; the world is not what it should be;
God is calling us to move toward development of a more mature spirit, toward creation of a better world.

If, however, there is no Light of the world, then we are called to nothing.

If there is no Light that calls creation into being, then life is an accident, and even the sun's role as a catalyst for existence is pure happenstance.

If there is no Light of the world we have no hope of progress to anywhere; our existence, indeed, the existence of all that is, can look forward to no ultimate meaning.

If you have been paying attention to recent judicial decisions, you have surely noted that federal courts have ruled the scientific theory of "intelligent design" to be yet another surreptitious attempt by the religious right to encourage the promulgation of religious doctrine in public schools. On the surface, I think that assessment is merited; I suspect the courts have ruled rightly on the issue before their bench. Yet there is a great deal more at stake in this matter than meets the eye.

You see, if Bobbie Hinson, one of our members and a highly-decorated high school science teacher, explains to her class that the fossil records and other evidence substantiate the notion that life generally evolved from lesser life-forms to greater, from simple cells to more complex tissue arrangements, I have no objection. Evolution seems a reasonable explanation for the mechanics of nature's development.

But here's the problem.

Many in the scientific community go beyond the observable data to inject their own atheistic philosophy.

They argue that the whole saga of existence,

from its Big Bang origin, to the formation of galaxies,

to the development of stars, to the maturation of planets, to the mixing of some primordial soup on some tiny iota of a rock in the universe named earth,

to the sparking of some single, simple cell that gave rise to other cells that eventually morphed into increasingly complex arrangements of cells that finally become manifest

in elephants, butterflies, dolphins and human beings with a highly-refined sense of consciousness – this whole process took place by aimless accident! All of life is happenstance.

Such a contention does not make sense to me. It does not make sense to many scientists.

As one of them has rather famously observed, "The chance of natural selection's producing even an enzyme is on the order of a tornado's roaring through a junkyard and coming up with a 747!"

At the heart of atheistic evolution's theory is the startling notion that life came from non-life, consciousness derived from unconsciousness, intelligence emerged out of dullness, darkness spawned light.

Christianity (and Judaism) hold to a different view: we have life, the universe has existence, because its origin is rooted in the reality of a Cosmic Love that infuses the entire developmental process and to this day calls us a higher plane of living.

At this point I could offer you a wealth of scientific knowledge as to why I believe it is more reasonable to believe that a Cosmic Light of love called all creation into being, but I am more interested this morning in another topic:

what is the kind of life that God is calling us to live? How are we being called to evolve?

There are two impulses within us that I believe are instilled within us by God and to which the call of God's Light naturally appeals.

I am aware that there is a perspective that says the call of the spiritual is life-denying, unnatural.

I disagree: the Light of God that breaks in upon our lives is as natural as sunrise.

There are two natural impulses within us that God illumines and empowers:

the impulse toward improvement,

and the impulse toward expanding our sense of self to include our impact upon the lives of others.

You and I are wired with the innate desire to improve our self and our environment.

We are wired to improve the lives of those we love.

When we pick up the paper and read about a father stabbing to death beautiful little twins, we know that something went wrong in that man's soul and mind. What he did was unnatural, contrary to the way we are designed to live. Every January, even if we make no stated resolutions, some unbidden spark within us spurs us to become better human beings. We want to become healthier, we want to treasure those we love a little more successfully, we want to develop our talents and expand our appreciation for the full spectrum of life's opportunities. Why do advertising agencies put "new and improved," on every product? Because an impulse deep within the human psyche cries out for that which is new and improved! As Huston Smith observed, "If someone sets out to build a better mousetrap, his objective makes perfect sense and all that remains is for us to wish him luck. But if someone sets out to build a worse mousetrap, that might require the explanations of a psychiatrist."

We are wired to improve our lives, to improve the lives of those around us. When the Light of Christ falls full upon us, it heightens our natural impulse to do good. When we see crying children, we are wired to go hug them. When we see teenagers who are aimless, we are wired to guide them. When we see someone who is lonely there is a spur within us to comfort them. When we see someone who is hungry there is a hollowness within our own being. When we see someone who is naked, we feel too rich. When we see someone who is excluded, our own hearts burn with indignation. Such impulses are the very call of the Light of the Spirit, directing us toward the realm of a higher life. The call of the Light is ever calling us toward greater acts of compassion and transformation, shining a light for us upon paths that lead to a higher plane of living. God is not calling us toward that which is unnatural. God is calling us toward our truest self.

We have this impulse toward improvement of ourselves and our world. We also have this impulse to expand our sense of self as to be more cognizant of the needs of others. Jesus says that if we want to find ourselves, the only way to do so is to lose ourselves. This sounds on the surface like theological mumbo-jumbo. But any true student of human nature knows that our Lord is offering a formula of truth!

A man comes into a counselor's office, a long-time alcoholic to whom God has given the power and grace to break free of that dependency. Now he struggles with real life. In the past, when the pressures of life grew great, he simply crawled inside his bottle. Now, living free of that bottle, he feels a greater sense of responsibility to everyone. He feels the impact of his actions upon his children, his spouse, his friends. He admits that he has never lived with such an awareness of the impact of his actions upon others. The counselor says to him, "God has awakened you from a long sleep." The man says, "Yes, exactly; God woke me up!" He had been living a sort of existence, but now he has broken free to live at a different level. Now he feels an expanded sense of responsibility, living with an awareness of how his life influences the lives of everyone around him. His life, in one sense, is a tougher existence – but it is a more enriching existence, and he is prouder of it.

A young couple comes into a counselor's office in the first year of their marriage; they are struggling. The counselor examines their communal life and it becomes clear that each of them is selfish.

Each of them is trying to pursue his or her own agenda independently of the other.

The counselor must speak the hard truth:

your love will not mature until you expand your sense of self so that it encompasses the purposes and desires of your spouse.

The counselor must say, when you cherish your spouse's agenda even more than you do your own, that's when your marriage will begin to progress.

Such a prescription sounds crazy until they practice it, then strangely enough, in cherishing each other's agendas, they find their own identity. That's when a marriage can flourish.

What I am trying to say to you, my friends, is there are different planes of reality.

We often find ourselves living at one level, but then the Spirit of God calls us to live another.

If you don't believe in God, you don't believe that's true.

If there is no God, then what is, we can rise nowhere, true progress is not possible.

The great professor of religion Huston Smith said that when he wrote a book arguing that life flows downward from God into creation, calling us to higher and higher planes of living,

his departmental chair at a state university became so agitated with him that they argued right through the afternoon and into an impromptu supper, without reaching resolution.

Suddenly the departmental chair went silent. After an uncomfortably long pause Smith asked why.

The man said, "I was thinking about a question my six-year-old asked me last night. He had walked into the room when we were watching a somewhat violent shoot-em-up and he immediately became disturbed.

His first question to us was, 'Daddy, is this real?'"

Suddenly the departmental chair realized that his child could see a distinction that his brilliant father had been unwilling to admit: yes, indeed, there are varying degrees of reality.

To know Christ is to begin to know ourselves.

That sounds perhaps too mystical for our material age, but we can begin to understand its truth by taking small steps.

The more you practice mercy, the more you practice compassion,

the more you practice generosity, the more you practice love,

the more you practice grace, the more you practice service,

by such small steps on the paths of the Spirit,

the more you will begin to know the very personality of the nature of God.

As the Light of Christ shines on us, our spiritual capacities thaw and expand,

and we come to know who we really are.

Let us claim in the center of our lives this word of promise from our Lord:

"I am the Light of the World, and he who follows me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the Light of life."

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