

We generally enjoy somewhere around 294 sunny days each year. That's about 90 more than the average nation-wide, so it's really not much of an issue, here in Las Cruces... but in other regions where there is not as many days of sunshine, and the winter months mean frequent dreary and cloudy day it's not uncommon for people to experience deep feelings of depression, sadness and cranky-irritability. I'm describing a condition called "Seasonal Affective Disorder" which is defined as, "a pattern of seasonal depression experienced by otherwise healthy and happy people." In Washington State I remember seeing advertisements for "light therapy" being offered at counseling centers in Seattle, where clients could sit with bright full-spectrum lights, and according to University of Washington studies, in about 75% of the cases, patients exposed to that light, will experience noticeable relief and improvement.

Light is essential for any life at all to exist and continue. Light is so important and necessary for life that it was the first word God spoke at Creation,

Genesis 1:3-4

Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.

In the Bible, the word light appears in more than 530 verses, and is most frequently used as a metaphor to describe some characteristic, blessing or truth about God.

In the Gospel of John, the word light is used in many different ways, referring to Jesus himself, to God's mercy, truth and grace, to the Lord's power to transform and bless our lives, in addition to bringing healing, hope and understanding. In the passage we read from John's Gospel today, many of those meanings are in play when Jesus says,

John 8:12

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

The verses we read today are associated with a story about Jesus healing a man blind from birth, on the Sabbath. But rather than recognizing God's miracle of that healing, the religious leaders are upset that Jesus did it on the Sabbath. That conflict becomes a lesson on faith, about who Jesus is and what he came to accomplish, making the connection, that to not see the light is what it means to be blind. Jesus is the Light, sent by God to heal, reconcile and save this sin-broken world. That light will shine into dark places exposing corruption, and will also reveal the gracious work of God in this world. That same Light is also the Lord's invitation to healing grace, which is the offer of abundant life that God desires to give to any who will respond, believe and follow in faith.

In John, Jesus is the Light, who is and who proclaims the free gift and blessing of God's gracious love and mercy. But the religious authorities reject all of that from Jesus. By refusing to believe they are choosing to be blind to God's mercy, presence, saving-purpose and truth. By refusing to see God's grace right in front of them, they were choosing to remain lost in the darkness... and their spiritual blindness was a much bigger problem than the blind man had, even before Jesus healed him. With that context and understanding in mind, listen again to how Jesus uses the contrast between light and darkness. First, the light, which is the positive and promise: I am the light of the world... Whoever follows me... will have the light of life. The light is with you... walk while you have the light Believe in the light, so that you may become children of light. I have come as light into the world... to save the world. Now in contrast, the darkness, about the rejection and warning: Whoever follows me will never

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walk in darkness so that the darkness may not overtake you if you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness. In the light we grow, our lives blossom as God intends for us, and we can withstand the struggle and trials of this world. As we are transformed by the light of God's grace. The point John wants us to see is that we have and do make a choice - it's either Jesus Christ or darkness – there is no 3<sup>rd</sup> option.

In the Gospel of John, just as darkness is the absence and rejection of the light, evil and corruption are the absence and rejection of Christ. The coming of Jesus into the world and into our lives is the coming of the True Light into the despair of our darkness as proof of God's abiding love and presence that never abandons... and as children of the light, our call and purpose becomes to receive, to live and to reflect that light of God's grace. As we read in

Ephesians 5:8-9

For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light— for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.

One time a student asked a philosophy professor, "What is the meaning of life?"

The professor held up a very small, round mirror, about the size of a quarter. Then he said, "When I was a small child, during the war, we were very poor and we lived in a remote village. One day, on the road, I found several broken pieces of a mirror from a wrecked German motorcycle. I tried to find all the pieces and put them together, but it was not possible, so I kept only the largest piece.

This one. And by scratching it on a stone, I made it round. I began to play with it as a toy and became fascinated by the fact that I could reflect light into dark places where the sun would not shine – in deep holes and crevices and dark closets. It became a game for me to get light into the most inaccessible places I could find.

I kept the little mirror, and as I went about my growing up, I would take it out in idle moments and continue the challenge of the game. As I became a man, I grew to understand that this was not just a child's game but a metaphor for what I might do with my life.

I am a fragment of a mirror and ... I can reflect light into the dark places of this world – into the black places in the hearts of men – and change some things in some people. Perhaps others may see and do likewise. This is what I am about.

This is the meaning of my life. So too for us, as commanded in

Matthew 5:14-16

"You are the light of the world. ... let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.