

**Turn on the Light and Believe  
John 3:14-21**

**Dr. Don Flowers Jr.  
Port Williams United Baptist Church  
4th Sunday of Lent**

I just want to say that this is my least favorite Sunday of the year!

To be clear it has nothing to do with the rollercoaster temperatures—one day balmy and the next freezing. It's Nova Scotia in March, it's what we expect, right? It has nothing to do with the fact that for another year Wake Forest Basketball is horrible and we will not be playing in March Madness! Nor does it have anything to do with this being the 4th Sunday of Lent (or is in in Lent) knowing that we have 2 more weeks until we get to Easter.

No, this is my least favorite Sunday of the year because it is the beginning of Daylight Savings Time. This is the day when we all stumble into worship a bit sleep deprived, if we stumble in on time at all! This is the day when I wonder if I will make it through lunch to my Sunday afternoon nap!

I don't like this time. And what time is it, anyway. It is a time of chaos. As I walk through the house I ask myself, did I change that clock? The microwave and the stove say it is one time, but the coffee pot says something different. (I am going with Coffee Pot Time!) Then there is the dilemma of changing the clock in the car, or choosing just to wait until November when it will be right again! Thank God my computer and phone and iPad change automatically!

(In case you are wondering it is \_\_\_\_\_)

This is the time of the year when my morning routine is altered. For the past few weeks I have grown accustomed to waking up just as dawn is breaking. It is not blaring sun, but enough to let me find my house shoes; enough to see the steps as I make my way downstairs; enough to find the coffee pot.

But this morning!

This morning I stumbled around like a blind man, hoping my shoes are on the right foot; praying that Anita hasn't rearranged the furniture; hoping that I can remember how many stairs we have. This is the morning when I am so very grateful for that little light we have for guests at the top of the stairs.

You see, this is a dangerous time! Researchers have told us so! This twice a year resynchronization of our body clocks have implications. Time change has been linked to increase health risks such as depression, obesity, cancer and heart attacks. There are between 5-10% more auto accidents in the two weeks following time change.<sup>1</sup> So be careful out there!

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<sup>1</sup> <https://utswmed.org/medblog/daylight-saving-time-sleep-health/#:~:text=In%20fact%2C%20this%20twice%2Da,cancer%2C%20and%20even%20car%20accidents>

Now I know there are going to be benefits, eventually. I know there are going to be longer evenings which means I can barbecue without guess work. I know that I can play golf after work, if the snow ever melts. I know that those birds that sit right outside our bedroom window in the summer will wake me up at 4:30 rather than 3:30! I know there are advantages, but today I would be happy with a little more light.

That is not always the case. It wasn't the case in our gospel lesson for this morning. Usually our attention is drawn to that most well known verse in all the Bible, "*For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have eternal life.*"<sup>2</sup> That is where we focus and miss out on the beginning, and the end.

This story follows right after Jesus temple temple tantrum that we heard last week, the time when Jesus disrupted the way things were, had been, disrupted the way business went on in the temple. People were talking about it!

And so one evening, Nicodemus took it on himself to pay Jesus a visit. Maybe he did it in the evening to make sure that he wasn't infringing on Jesus time. Maybe it was the only time in his busy schedule that he could work it in. But most of the time we have read that he "came to Jesus by night" the same way that we sneak into the NSLC late at night. He didn't want anyone to know.

After all, he had a reputation to maintain. He was not just some random person. He was a leader among the Jews, a Pharisee, and later in the gospel we learn that he was among the Sanhedrin. They were the 23 members who would hear appeals from lower courts. So Nicodemus was a big deal!

So you can imagine what it would look like if he was seen having a private meeting with Jesus right after this disturbance in the temple! What would people think? What would they say? Can you imagine? Of course you can!

But he was intrigued, and so even with the risks, he sought Jesus out. At night. When there wasn't much light.

There are times when we prefer the dark, aren't there? Friday the New York Times featured an editorial entitled "We were born to be kissed in the dark."<sup>3</sup> It is a remembrance of the way life used to be, when people met in nightclubs and danced into the wee hours of the morning, that time when as the writers recall "*In the dark, we become kissin'-friends.*"

Do you remember that time, a time, maybe as a teenager you were at a school dance? Maybe over in the corner with someone who made your heart beat faster, taking that tentative chance to figure out how to kiss? And just when you think you have it right, suddenly the lights come on, the music stops and you are left feeling...well, exposed, embarrassed. You weren't doing anything wrong, but still, other people might have seen you. You might have seen you.

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<sup>2</sup> John 3:16. *KJV*

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/03/11/opinion/covid-isolation-dance.html?action=click&module=Opinion&pgtype=Homepage>

What happens when the light comes on, and you are seen?

Embarrassment?

Shame?

Guilt?

Denial?

Anger?

Yes! All those and more!

We have seen that this past week in our world, haven't we? Last Sunday evening in an interview with Oprah Winfrey Harry and Meghan Sussex shone light on the trauma they had experienced in the past years. Meghan shared her depression that led her to thoughts of suicide; they shared the hidden racism that suddenly was revealed in what may have been an offhanded remark about the color of their baby's skin. Maybe it was a joke, but the light came on revealing a family secret.

Maybe what created the stir was the fact that we all could relate. We all have those secrets that we pray to God will never see the light of day. They are the secrets that our families hide from the world; secrets we hide from the children; secrets we hide from ourselves.

The secret of that abusive uncle and the shame that you carry to this day, having never told anyone, even your parents, and it was decades ago and he is long since deceased.

That child give up for adoption years ago which no one knows about.

The secret of alcohol abuse that the whole family witnessed, experienced, but no one has ever spoken of, especially when those tendencies start to show up in another family member.

The secret of the bruises that you hide with long sleeve shirts, with extra make up, with the explanation that you just slipped, you know how clumsy I am.

What are the secrets you hide in the dark?

And it is not just our secrets. We all carry with us the ghosts of our families, those things that have shaped our history whether we confess them or not; the hopes and prejudices that lurk inner souls. All of them are a part of us.

In his play *Ghosts* Henrik Ibsen wrote:

*"I almost think we're all of us Ghosts ... It's not only what we have invited from our father and mother that walks in us. It's all sorts of dead ideas, and lifeless old beliefs, and so forth. They have no vitality, but they cling to us all the same, and we can't get rid of them. Whenever I take up a newspaper, I seem to see Ghosts gliding between the lines. There must be Ghosts all the country over, as thick as the sand of the sea. And then we are, one and all, so pitifully afraid of the light."*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.garrisonkeillor.com/radio/twa-the-writers-almanac-for-march-13-2021/>

We are afraid of the light, and yet.... Until we shine that light on our secrets, on our truth can we really be free? Frederick Buechner wrote an entire book entitled *Telling Secrets* in which he talked about his father's suicide, his child's eating disorder, his own sense of shame and frustration and powerlessness. As he begins he says:

*"I have come to believe that by and large the human family all has the same secrets, which are both very telling and very important to tell. They are telling in the sense that they tell what is perhaps the central paradox of our condition—that what we hunger for perhaps more than anything else is to be known in our full humanness, and yet that is often just what we also fear more than anything else.*

*It is important to tell at least from time to time the secret of who we truly and fully are—even if we tell it only to ourselves—because otherwise we run the risk of losing track of who we truly and fully are and little by little come to accept instead the highly edited version which we put forth in hope that the world will find it more acceptable than the real thing.*

*It is important to tell our secrets too because it makes it easier that way to see where we have been in our lives and where we are going. It also makes it easier for other people to tell us a secret or two of their own, and exchanges like that have a lot to do with what being a family is all about and what being human is all about."*<sup>5</sup>

Telling our secrets to a trusted other may be the light that we need to shine on our lives. It is the light that lets us know we aren't alone; that we are heard; that we are loved.

That is a hard thing to do. We have been taught that to keep our secrets, especially those that are ours, the things we have done, the reality of who we are. But Christ comes to shine light on the world. As Eugene Peterson paraphrased Jesus, *"God-light streamed into the world, but men and women everywhere ran for the darkness. They went for the darkness because they were not really interested in pleasing God. Everyone who makes a practice of doing evil, addicted to denial and illusion, hates God-light and won't come near it, fearing a painful exposure. But anyone working and living in truth and reality welcomes God-light so the work can be seen for the God-work it is."*<sup>6</sup>

We need to welcome the light into our lives, for it does reveal the things for which we need to repent, those ways that we need to turn around and go in a different ways. That needs to happen for us as individuals. It needs to happen for us as a congregation. It needs to happen for us as a nation. We need to have God's light shine so that we might see where we are, who we are, and where we want to go.

The story is told of a hiker who got separated from his group. He kept thinking that if he kept going this way surely he would meet up with them. He kept hiking, until it began to get dark. Still he trudged on, until finally he thought, "I need to stop for the night. Surely they will find me in the morning." So he rolled out his sleeping bag and curled up and fell asleep.

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<sup>5</sup> Frederick Buechner, *Telling Secrets*. (Harper:San Francisco, 1991) 2-3. <https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/118704>

<sup>6</sup> John 3:19-21. *The Message*.

The next morning he awoke as the sun began to rise, as the birds began to sing. He sat up and gazed out at the vista in front of him. It seemed to stretch forever. Then he understood why. He was on the very edge of a cliff. Had he continued on in the dark...

That is why we need the light of Christ to shine on us. We need the light of Christ to shine on us to let us know that we need to stop, turn around, and believe. We need God's light to shine so we can be honest about who we are, where we hurt, where we need healing, where we need repentance.

It is only when we are confronted with God's light that we can truly believe, and what that belief leads us to do makes apparent who we really are.<sup>7</sup>

It is the word we heard on Christmas Eve. "*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*"<sup>8</sup> It is the way of life. Thanks be to God.

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<sup>7</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John a Commentary*. (Louisville: Westminster, 1971), 159.

<sup>8</sup> John 1:5. *NRSV*.