

Sermon preached at Gisborne, 25 December, 2020

Mighty God, the shepherds of old were full of your praises, saying that all they had heard and seen was mirrored by what they had been told. Move among us now with your Holy Spirit, that we too might hear and experience the wonder and joy of the living word as we seek to welcome the written word into our lives. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Works of the Light

There is a Jewish story titled, 'the Big Room.' It goes like this. A long time ago, there lived a very old king. He wanted one of his three sons to succeed him as king, but he did not know which one. One day, the king called his three sons into his room and told them: "Under the palace is a big empty room that is never used. I am going to make a contest that is going to put that room to use. You can fill the room with anything you want. Whoever fills the room the most for thirty days," said the king, "will become king when I pass away."

The three sons left the king's room. The oldest son was given the first chance to fill the big room. He ordered his servants to fill the room with as many stones as possible. For spaces between the stones, they filled those up with smaller stones. At the end of the day, the trumpets were blown, and the king came to inspect the big room. The king was very happy to see how full the room was. The room was emptied, and now it was the second son's turn. He also had thirty days.

The second son decided to fill the room with feathers. Following his order, his servants began to fill the room with so many feathers, that the room seemed to be almost filled to capacity. When the thirtieth day came, the trumpets were blown, and the king came to check out the room. When he opened the door, feathers started flying all over. The king was very happy to see his smart work and praised his effort, but he said, "there are still some small spaces that can be filled."

Now it was the third son's turn. The first day passed, and it seemed as if he had not yet decided. The second day, too, he did not say anything. Eventually the thirtieth day came, and still, the room was empty. Everybody was wondering, how did the youngest son expect to fill the room? He only had a few hours left!

Towards the end of the day, the youngest son came out of his room with a small box in his hands. He then went into the big room and closed the door behind himself. At the end of the day, the trumpets were blown and the king came to check the room. When he opened the door, he smiled. There was his son, holding a lit candle in his hand. He had filled the room with light...

The story is a wonderful reminder of the works of the light in the world. What is the best part in this story in your opinion? For me, by filling the room with the light, the youngest son not only fulfilled the condition of the contest, but also, he made the room still usable. The light not only filled the room entirely, but it also enabled the room available for anyone. This story tells us the work of the light in our lives.

In John 1:1-14, when the light came to the world, the world together with his own people neither comprehended the light nor accepted it. In v 5, the verb 'overcome' (καταλαμβάνω: *katalambano*) in Greek, means 'to comprehend,' or 'to accept.' It shows our inability to discern what the true light of life is. But by the grace of God, we have received Jesus as our savior. The apostle Paul said, now we know that we also live in him.¹ Using the analogies in the story of the Big Room, we'll find how the light works in us to become the children of God.

The light allows us to see us things from totally new perspectives. The youngest son may have thought very hard about the quest of filling up the room entirely. Then he may have realized that it's not possible to fill the room no matter what materials he would use. For 29 days, he may agonizingly have thought about it. A day is defined by the evening and the morning as in Genesis 1. It is the work of the light. His observation of 29 evenings and 29 mornings may have inspired him about the presence of the light. The same thing happened when we receive the light in our midst as we became new creation.

The light enables us to let go of old things. Once we began to live in the light, we can see things better in the light of Christ. It helps us let go of the old selves which have been rooms of grudges, resentments, regrets, unforgiving hearts until we let them go entirely and live in the light of Christ.

Lastly, the light lets us become the light for others. By impression, it looks very cool to become the light for others like heroes and heroines. But biblical sense of the light is far from the worldly view of the light. In 2 Corinthians 6:3-10, Paul describes what believers lives as the light of the world look like.

(3) We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, (4) but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, (5) beatings, imprisonments, riots, labours, sleepless nights, hunger; (6) by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, (7) truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; (8) in honour and dishonour, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; (9) as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; (10) as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything...

Being the light of Christ for others doesn't look simple and easy. But in this way, we are being built into the temple of God, Paul says. The light has come and now it is working in the world. The world cannot remain the same as before. Likewise, those who have received the light cannot remain in the same as before. Letting go has already begun in us and the journey in the light also. There is no going back, but living in the light is the only way we take. May the grace of God keep us steadfast until we finish this journey in the light of Christ. Amen.

¹ Colossians 2:6-7 'As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, (7) rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.