

God of Wonders: Light

This is the fifth message in a seven part series in which we're looking at God through the lens of powerful Biblical metaphors. All messages in the series are available on www.GrowWithSecond.org.

**A Sermon Preached by
Jeffrey W. Gibelius, Pastor
Second Presbyterian Church,
Carlisle, Pennsylvania**

April 10, 2011

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. 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. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Genesis 1:1-5 NRSV

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

John 1:1-5 NRSV

Christians cannot describe God without referring to light in some way at some point. God created light, before anything else. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." [John 8:12] Then he said, "You are the light of the world, let your light shine." [Matthew 5:16] There's something about light that makes it a really powerful metaphor for the way God impacts our lives.

Light is essential for life: if there's no light, there's no photosynthesis, and no plants, and no food, and no us. When we say that God is like light, we're saying that without *God* nothing could exist. We need light

for warmth, for food, for energy... for life. We need God for these things, too.

Lights are part of every aspect of our life. So is God. You can take almost any light and find a lesson about God in it.

Consider the humble nightlight. Nightlights have saved many a child from whatever monsters dwell under their beds. But young children aren't the only people afraid of the dark, are they? A few thousand years ago a grown up wrote, "The LORD is my light and my salvation -- whom shall I fear?" [Psalm 27:1] That adult wouldn't have called God his light if he or she hadn't been first afraid of the dark. Next time you are anxious about a test, or a tournament, or tomorrow, remember that you have a nightlight, a God who isn't afraid of the dark, a God for whom "darkness is as light," [Psalm 139:12] who lights up the world. *That* God can take care of the monsters under your bed and any other problems we may have. Many of us would do well to give our problems, worries, and fears to God before we fall asleep each night—let God deal with them.

And think about a flashlight. Without a flashlight on a camping trip those long lonely trips to the outhouse seem a lot longer and lonelier. Without a flashlight midnight searches in the tent for your missing sock take forever. Without a flashlight most campers who walk at night end up in the nurse's station. When I was a Boy Scout camp counselor I used to pride myself on how well I knew every trail in the camp and how I almost never carried a flashlight. The younger boys wondered how I found my way around so easily. What I didn't tell them was that instead of looking *down* at night to find the trail, I looked *up*. I'd see the openings between the trees and the contrast with the night sky – the stars were my flashlight—that's how I knew where to go. We all need some kind of light to help us find our way, to keep us from tripping, to help us find what we're looking for. God's Word – the Bible – is like a flashlight. [Psalm 119:105]. It shows us how to live and which way to turn. It reveals the ruts and roots that would cause us to stumble. [Proverbs 4:18]

So many of us stumble through life. The sad part is that it's usually the little things that cause the biggest falls. We trip on our own laziness, dishonesty, or lack of discipline. Walls of bad habits leave us bruised and battered as we stubbornly keep making the same mistakes. Like a good flashlight, the Bible shows us another way. We don't have to keep searching

for in the dark for answers and hope. That Bible right beside your beds or on your bookshelf can throw a whole lot of light on the subject.

Not many of us have a theater spotlight in our homes, but they have their purposes. Doctors and dentists use smaller versions of these intensely bright lights to look deep into our ears and mouths and other places where the sun don't shine. They know that if they are going to find disease, decay, and infection they need a really bright light. We don't necessarily like what doctors do with those lights, but we know that seeing what's making us sick is the first step toward getting well.

I remember a pastor talking about having a ceiling painted in his church's worship auditorium. It was a very high ceiling, at least 75' up, so after the contractors were done he borrowed a theater spot to inspect the work. He brought in the foreman of the painting company and flipped the switch. What had just looked like a perfectly painted black ceiling was suddenly revealed to be spotted with dozens of bare patches. The pastor insisted that the contractor re-paint. The contractor argued that if you couldn't see the bare spots without a light, it was good enough. No one was ever going to see it anyway because no light would ever shine there. In the end, the ceiling got re-painted. Good enough was simply not good enough for God's house. Spotlights reveal flaws, defects, and problems that we'd rather hide. But the good news is that once we can see what we're dealing with, then we can fix it.

God's truth and goodness is kind of like a spotlight on our lives, isn't it? We like to think that we are pretty good people – and we are – but none of us is near ready for Heaven. Heaven is a place of *perfection*, otherwise it wouldn't be heaven (as it says in the First letter of John: “God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.” [1 John 1:5]). Discovering that we have cracks and bare patches – sins – in our lives shouldn't discourage us; it should lead us back to God who covers us perfectly with the grace of Christ.

Have you ever considered how a traffic light is like God? What are traffic lights supposed to do? Keep us from running into each other. Without traffic lights we would get into accidents every day. And traffic would be backed up for miles. I can hear the endless conversation at four-way intersections: “You go first,” “no, you go first,” no really, I insist, you go first...”

The commands we find in God's Word – to love God and love each other like Christ loves us – aren't meant to keep us from having fun, they are meant to keep us from killing each other and ourselves. [Proverbs 6:23] When we follow God's commands life flows much smoother; God's commands don't slow us down in the long run; they help us get to where we need to go. They tell us when to yield to one another, when to stop so we don't hurt each other, and when to go. If God were a traffic light operating in your life right now, what color would the light be? Think about a particular decision you need to make. Consider a choice between two paths ahead. Is God telling you to be cautious? Is God warning you to stop? Or is God saying, "go, go, go"? It would be great if we all had one of these traffic lights in our houses so God could signal us, but through prayer and through the advice of faithful companions we can at least sense what color the light from God is. We just have to be willing to ask.

In some ways God is like a lighthouse. The first lighthouse that we know of was built about 250 years before Christ off the coast of Alexandria, Egypt. Ever since then they have steered sailors away from dangerous coastlines and welcomed them to safe harbors. When a sailor sees a lighthouse in an unfamiliar area, he knows to turn-around, as fast as possible, or else he's going to run aground and wreck. This isn't too different from the turn-around that sometime happens when we start taking our relationship with Jesus seriously. The Bible compares this moment to turning from "darkness to light" [Acts 26:18]. The fancy church word for this turn-around is "repentance;" it's when we see that if we keep heading where we're heading we are going to crash.

The hard part – and the *necessary* part – for sailors is trusting the light house and turning around when every ounce of their being says, "just get to the shore." It's the same with we God. We have to trust God, even when we can't see the danger ahead. What looks perfectly safe to us may well be disastrous. Our nation's coastlines are littered with wrecks from ships piloted by captains who thought they knew better. I bet we all have family and friends who made similar mistakes with God.

Lighthouses warn people of danger, but they have another purpose, too. When we've been adrift at sea so long that it's hard to know which way to turn, when we've been tossed around and beaten by storm after storm, when we're wondering if we can hold it together for one more day, God is

still that lighthouse, shining brightly through the mist and fog, guiding us home.

What kind of light do you need God to be today?

A nightlight to calm your fears?
 A flashlight to show you the way?
 A spotlight to help you see what you need to fix in your life?
 A traffic light to guide you in your relationships?
 Or a lighthouse to keep you safe?

God is all these things and more.

God knows that we need light—for guidance, for hope, for life. God has heard us pray with the Psalmist, “Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD. . . . [M]y soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning.” [Psalms 130:1,6] Don’t be afraid to ask God to shine on your life – or the life of someone you love -- in a special and particular way.

Would you pray with me? O Great Light of the World, shine on us, warm our hearts, guide our feet, illumine our minds. Keep us free from fear and teach us the joy of following you. Let us reflect your light to every place where darkness has found a home. May our shining cast away the shadows of doubt and anxiety and bring you much glory. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Dear Friend,

I hope you have been blessed by this message. You can request a free CD recording of this sermon by contacting the church office. We also have a complete sermon archive (including audio-files and PDFs) on-line at www.GrowWithSecond.org.

Second Presbyterian Church is a thriving congregation celebrating over 175 years of service to God and God’s people. It would be our joy to help you grow in faith, hope, and love. Please consider being our guest for Sunday worship at 8 or 10:30am. Children’s Church and infant and toddler care are always provided.

Jeff Gibelius, Pastor

Second Presbyterian Church
528 Garland Dr.
Carlisle, PA 17013
www.GrowWithSecond.org
717-243-4571

© 2011 Jeffrey Gibelius

This sermon is intended for personal use and distribution. If you want to use it for anything else, I'd be honored. Just call for permission. No claims of absolute originality are made for this material. As one man said, "I churn my own butter, but I use milk from other men's cows."