

The Light of the World

John 8:12

Communication is a fascinating study. I don't mean in the academic sense, although I am sure that the statement would stand, I mean in terms of personal experience. How often do you find yourself saying one thing and then discovering that the person you spoke with heard you say something else? For example, if I said, Did you hear that Ohtani signed with the Angels? The Dodger fans in the room might think that I am mocking their team when really, I am only disappointed that my team, the Giants, didn't get him. (Giants fans, by the way never thought that it would happen for them)

Another example might be the husband who thanks his wife for getting ready on time so that they can leave for church. Then, the wife replies angrily, "I'm tired of you always blaming me for being late. Half of the time when I am late, I still have to wait on you." By the time the old argument had died down, they were late again. He meant to give an encouraging word but his wife heard him blaming her for what she saw as a shared problem.

Last week we connected Jesus' word, "I am the light of the world." to His intervention on behalf of the woman who was caught in adultery. He had asked the crowd that was trying to trap Him, "Let he who is without sin throw the first stone." Slowly the crowd had slipped away so that only Jesus and the woman were left. Jesus asked her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" She answered, "No one, Lord." Then Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and sin no more." The woman left having passed through the most traumatic moments of her life. How many emotional extremes do you think she might have passed through from the passionate embrace of her lover to the shame of discovery, to the threats of stoning, to the public interrogation, to the intervention of Jesus, to the disappearance of the crowd, to the forgiveness and admonition she received from the Lord? The disciples who watched all of this from a safe distance must have ridden their own emotional roller coaster. There

can be no doubt that they observed a woman who had changed before their very eyes. No one would have expected her to change for anyone but at the end, they all believed that she had.

So when Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." His comment attached naturally to the woman whose life had just been changed. She had been living in darkness but now - no more! Jesus had called this lowly sinner out of her rebellion and spiritual despondency to a new beginning with hope and direction. He had demonstrated the difference His light could make by bringing salvation to the most unlikely of converts. Jesus had generalized the possibilities by inviting anyone willing to participate. "He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." In other words, Jesus was saying that if anyone were to follow Him and become His disciple (like the woman) then by definition that person would lay aside his sins and begin to really live in the way that God has always intended.

This is what Jesus said but the Pharisees and religious leaders heard Jesus say, "I am the light of the world and you are not a light at all..." Immediately, they renewed their attacks upon Jesus. The remainder of chapter 8 is a conversation of controversy that was kindled when Jesus said one thing and the Pharisees heard Him say something else. Why did this happen? Why does it happen to us?

Jesus' treatment of the woman demonstrated values that the Pharisees did not share. Jesus saw the humanity and weakness of all people. He did not classify some groups as superior to others for he knew that everyone needed salvation. It was as natural for Jesus to grant forgiveness and a second chance to a repentant adulteress as to commend the honest and transparent answer of a religious leader. There was no moral difference between the woman and her accusers but there was more hope for her than for them.

The Pharisees viewed the sinners of their society as hopeless outcasts. Their attempts to reform were pitifully hopeless. Everyone knew they would just go back to who they were. They loved the contrast between themselves and tax collectors, prostitutes and other sinners such as the woman they had caught in

the act of adultery. They were superior to these others in every way and part of giving them the respect they deserved was to give the proper level of contempt to sinners than to His respected elders. Jesus' attitude deserved condemnation.

When Jesus said that He was the light of the world by drawing attention to the changed life of a desperate immoral woman when everyone knew she wouldn't really change, He challenged the authority of His "superiors." He was attempting to take respect away from them. His attacks had to be answered.

All of this kept the Pharisees from actually hearing what Jesus did say in a way that could have helped them. It was not what Jesus said that needed correcting but their capacity to listen. They were themselves in the way of hearing what could change their lives.

In our Biblical example, Jesus was right and the Pharisees were wrong. The Pharisees did not hear what Jesus was saying because their sin was in the way. In our personal experience, our communication frustrations will rarely, if ever, be so cut and dried. When I say something to someone else there is a sinner speaking and a sinner listening. In the example of the husband who complimented his wife when she was on time, we could surmise that he knew he was treading on treacherous ground. He would have helped the situation by taking responsibility for some of their past struggles when they were already in the car and on the way to church. As in artful as his comment was, the wife could have given him the benefit of the doubt and agreed that she also enjoyed being on time.

It is not enough for us to claim that we have spoken clearly and therefore if you did not hear what I was saying then that is your problem. It is incumbent upon both the speaker and the hearer to consider the second party and to take into account their issues and personality in order to speak in a way that can be heard or to listen in a way that is able to discern the good in what was said.

In our conversations with each other we need to let go of any need we might have to be right and to converse instead toward what is best. We need to as much as possible get out of our own head and into the head of the one with

whom we are speaking. The effort required is considerable but the experience of actual communication that hears what is said is very rewarding.

Jesus kept trying. He spoke as one who knew the Father. He was seeking to appeal to any genuine thirst that the people might have to actually know God. He took them ultimately to the cross, a cross that was both not yet and already for those to whom Jesus was speaking. "When you lift up the Son of Man then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as the Father taught Me, I speak these things..." In that moment and since Jesus was convincing, "As He spoke these words, many believed in Him."