



LESSONS IN LIVING

“The Light Within”

A St. Andrew's Sermon
Delivered by Dr. Jim Rigby
August 24, 2025

Scripture Reading: Matthew 6:22-23 (*New International Version*)
(Jesus is teaching) *"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!"*

Sermon

Like a lot of you, I've always had a love-hate relationship with religion. When Marx called religion the opium of the people, I think that he's basically right about 90% of the Church. That it's as much an effort not to feel the pain of the world. But the healing we need includes our own heart, but also our connections to the world. If we don't realize the tie that binds us to each other, to life, to nature, to every animal and tree we see, then we're still wounded. This is a very hard time, and getting worse. I think it's a mistake to be a pessimist. I also think it's a mistake to be an optimist, at a time like this. What people need, what the world needs, is for us to simply hear and see and touch what's really happening.

The President sent troops into one Democratic city last week. He's threatening to send troops to Chicago to unravel the democratic leadership of this country. We recognize this from seeing it before. Yes, I have Trump Derangement Syndrome. I also have Mussolini Derangement Syndrome. I want democracy. I don't want one person calling all of the shots.

The redistricting map is obscene, and now it's a reality. Time magazine did a study of this, and I think it's important for church people to listen to this.

"Here's the blunt math on the Texas Republican proposal. Under this map, my team and I estimate it would take roughly 445,000 white residents to secure one member of Congress, but about 1 million 400 Latino residents and 2 million Black residents to secure the same. In effect, the political worth of a Latino Texan is cut to one-third of a white Texan, and for Black Texans to one-fifth."

This echoes some of the worst moments in American history.

I know that you probably didn't want something like this when you got dressed to come to church. I understand. I'm not that crazy about preaching on this. I'd rather preach on happy things, too. But the problem is the Church needs to be a rescue unit. People who are coming here

simply to find numbness probably need to find another community. Or a new minister. *(laughter)* That would work, too. But as long as I'm here, I hear Jesus calling us to care for other people. And that means not participating in their injustice. It's not enough to be an inclusive church. We have to be a justice church.

We're looking at a passage today. It's so hard; the way Christianity has been taught, people don't realize the powerful aid that Jesus is giving us to find peace in a time like this. The Sermon on the Mount is square one. It's home base for a Christian to find peace of mind in a time of injustice.

Today, we're looking at that saying, *If your eye is whole, if your eye is healthy, your body is filled with light. If it's not healthy, it will be filled with darkness.* I think what Jesus is saying, I'm going to break it down into three thoughts. Go ahead and laugh. *(laughter)* Somebody laughing. I think Jesus is saying you have it within you to deal with the trauma that we're facing as human beings. There's a depth within you. Your awareness comes from a place deep in the universe. That poem that says, *You are the light of the world.* To realize your consciousness is maybe the rarest treasure in the universe, at least that we know of. Think of the billions of years it took for that, for energy to become matter, for matter to become life, and for life to rise to awareness.

There's a sense in which every sentient being, not just human beings, but we are a light to the world. We perceive the world. There's always energy there, but it's our sentience that brings that energy into light, where it's something you can see and think and feel.

The Church has taught this focus on Jesus that I think misses the whole point, that this is about you and me. Yes, Jesus was a child of God. So are you. And that's the punchline. Realizing Jesus is a child of God doesn't help the world. For you to realize you've been sent here on a mission, that does change the world.

On Christmas, there's a story about a baby that was born, and you get a sense of the stars overhead. That's you. Yes, it's Jesus, but you are a child of the stars. You are an offspring of the universe itself. In your consciousness, you carry the mathematical grid that holds everything together, that creates everything. There's a very real sense in which we are the children of whatever the source is. The mystic Meister Eckhart used to say that we're all mothers of God and that God is always needing to be born.

I think that's the punchline of Christmas. It's when the sacred is born in your life that the message of Christmas becomes clear. You have it within you, but that means you have to stop looking for external authorities to give you your central guidance. I always like to say, If you're following me, you're already lost. But that's true of anyone or any book. You have within you, in your awareness, what the world is thirsting for.

I had a professor when I first started. I was a philosophy major; you can probably tell. At the University of Texas. This professor starts off philosophy class by saying that philosophy is like watching a ballerina build a house. Stay with me. *(laughter)* He said, *You want to learn from her the grace with which she holds the hammer, the beauty by which she drives the nail, but you don't want to live in the house she builds.* That became obvious with every philosopher we

studied. You don't want to copy anybody. You want to learn from everybody, but you don't want to copy anybody. You are unique. You are a gift for who you are. We all have to stop trading that away. For external approval.

Buddha said, *be a lamp unto yourself*. I think Jesus is saying something very similar. When your vision is sound, when your eye is sound, and he's not talking about physical vision, if you're seeing impaired, this is just as true for you. When you're perceptive of the world, you change the world and realize that that awareness is like a light on jaundice. It changes the world by its very nature.

The second thing I hear Jesus saying is that his focus is on awareness, not belief. Dogma, biblical literalism, doesn't take you one step closer to the life of love that Jesus was trying to call you to. If anything, it becomes an obstacle, a burden. Awareness takes us to love. Belief takes us to division, to confusion. I know I bring this up from time to time, but Jesus would not need to teach in parables if his lesson was what the Church says it is. If it was about dogma, if it was about theology, if it was about morals or ethics, he just would have said what it is. He wouldn't have had to use these riddles that drive you crazy. Or I guess they drive you out of being crazy, because they bring you to awareness and to depth.

That's deeper than anything that's happening to you. Again, remember, your consciousness is coming from the core of the universe. Even if you don't believe in anything about God or angels, devils, whatever, your consciousness is coming from someplace, and that's a place you need to learn and to know. Whatever you consider that to be.

When I was recuperating from the heart surgery, it was very strange to be on the sideline of things and watching the news, seeing the protests at the Capitol, and not being able to do anything, and watching the community here come together. It was so beautiful to see that. But things seem very weird when you're on the sidelines. Just simple things like I'd be taking my medicine, and for the first time, I noticed it says, take one by mouth. *(laughter)* I was thinking, how strange. That means somebody sometime put one in their ear or some other place I don't even want to think about. *(laughter)*

We sleep-walk throughout much of life. And a lot of what people think of religion is no more than sleep-walking. Jesus is calling us to something much, much deeper than that. Beliefs are like cataracts for the kind of love that Jesus is trying to teach. It doesn't matter if Jesus was born of a virgin. It just doesn't matter. It doesn't matter if there are three people in the Trinity, or four, or two. *Can you love? Can you bring that to this wounded world and do your part to help heal?*

The last thing I get more from gnostic texts like the Gospel of Thomas, they were written about the time of the Christian passage, but they were more playful, more mystical in some ways. The way the Gospel of Thomas translates this passage, it's *if your eye is whole, your body will be full of light. If it's divided, it will be full of darkness*. I think Jesus was also teaching us to live in the whole of things, to live ecologically. But if we see a world divided into nations, into classes, into races, into religions, our body fills with false information. We start thinking about people we don't know, we're not in relationship with. That's the darkness that's being talked about. In the

poetry, darkness is not bad. Darkness is the source of the light. Darkness is like a candle, and the light burns out of that. So this is not dualism.

And it's not ableism saying if you can't see, that seeing or hearing impairment makes you less than. It's also really important in a white supremacist culture to disclaim the idea that light is good, dark is bad. That's lasted way too long. All the angels, the pictures I saw looked like they come from Sweden. The devils look like they just left the tanning bed. We definitely don't want that opium. We don't want the kind of religion that gives us a divided world, that gives us a world that our heart can't survive in.

When I was in college, I ran across a line from Emerson that has been very important in my life. He said, *One of the ways to know whether something is true or not is if it illumines your path.* He said, *A true statement will reveal things about the world to you.* The Christianity I was taught didn't explain a thing. It needed explanation. That's not a helpful religion. A helpful religion will illumine from the inside out who you are, what your connections to other people are. That's the difference between an icon and an idol.

This doesn't really fit in the sermon, but I'm going to put it in there anyway. *(laughter)* Because I like it. This is one of my shoehorn moments. But this is Zelenskyy. It's a quote I saw on the web this week, the President of Ukraine. He says,

"I do not want my picture in your offices. The president is not an icon, an idol, or a portrait. Hang your kids' photos instead and look at them each time you are making a decision."

Yeah, that's somebody who understands.

It's very hard not to get bruised just by looking at the world. When that happens to you, there's no shame in stepping back and healing. That's also a gift to the world. But there's a peace within you that's deeper and stronger and truer than any of this stuff that's happening. Your consciousness is being born from the depths of the universe. Whatever the creative principle of the universe or the cosmos— that's in you.

So it's not inappropriate to say that you were sent into this crisis. That we as a community can be a healing agent in the world. We don't have to be guilty bystanders. We can have each other's back when we're too sad to go on, but we can also bring out the strength that's in every one of us.

One other quote I ran across this week that doesn't quite fit, but I like it. You'll get your money back, don't worry. *(laughter)* Yeah, you can skip this sermon when we do the copy of it. This is Douglas Block, I don't know who that is. *(laughter)* But he says,

"You are a child of the universe, fearfully and wonderfully made. In the history of creation, there's never been anyone like you. Accept this reality about yourself that you are special, a special, unique human being who has a place on this earth that no one else can fill. Acknowledge yourself as a glorious expression of your loving creator. This healthy self-love will form the foundation of a joyful and satisfying life. Then, as you love and accept yourself, your inner light will shine outward to bless and heal your fellow human beings."

When we look at the world, the last thing we need is an opium religion. We need to be the agents of healing. That's where our dignity is. That's where our courage is. So we have to remember that we have it within us to do this. Simply because of who you are. You have it within you to deal with this.

Second, Christianity is not about beliefs, it's about awareness, and that's what leads us to love. If you've always been on the outside of Christianity because you didn't believe such and such. That's what Jesus was trying to have happen. To let go of the beliefs, the memories, the legends, and simply move to the present moment and bring love here.

Finally, to know that when your eye is whole, when you're not wounded, when you don't believe in countries or sects of religion or classes of human beings or races of human beings, when you can see the whole of things, naturally and without any other effort, your body will fill with light.

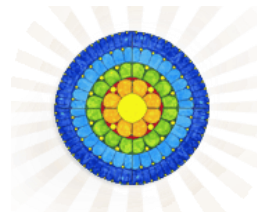
I invite you now to your own reflection on these words.

Benediction

Rev. Carol Johnson

When the world goes crazy, be wildly kind to everyone. Everyone? Everyone? *Everyone!* You can't control much, but you can control how you treat others. In this breaking news, heart-breaking world, where nothing seems certain, let raw kindness be a certainty. Let your compassion be a North Star that others can follow home. And may the love that birthed you, the love that is inside you, and the love that is all around you, help you each day as go forward. Amen.

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