

**“A Light for our Path”**

Meditation Preached by The Rev. Jennifer Cameron

February 7, 2021 – St. Columba Presbyterian Church, Belleville

**Hymns for Worship Video – February 7, 2021**

“Be still and know that I am God” #64 in the Book of Praise Vv. 1-3

*Lee Herrington | Tom Fettke*

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Be still and know that I am God  
Be still and know that I am God  
Be still and know that I am God

I am the Lord that healeth thee  
I am the Lord that healeth thee  
I am the Lord that healeth thee

In Thee O Lord I put my trust  
In Thee O Lord I put my trust  
In Thee O Lord I put my trust

“There is a Balm in Gilead” #747 in the Book of Praise Vv. 1-3

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*Chorus*

There is a balm in Gilead, to make the wounded whole  
There is a balm in Gilead, to heal the sin-sick soul

Sometimes I feel discouraged  
And think my work's in vain  
But then the Holy Spirit  
Revives my soul again

*Chorus*

Don't ever feel discouraged  
For Jesus is your Friend  
And if you lack for knowledge  
He'll ne'er refuse to lend

*Chorus*

If you cannot preach like Peter  
If you cannot pray like Paul  
You can tell the Love of Jesus  
And say He died for all

*Chorus*

“Praise Him, Praise Him, Jesus our Blessed Redeemer” #372 in the Book of Praise Vv. 1-3

*Chester G. Allen / Fanny Jane Crosby*

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Praise Him, praise Him Jesus our blessed Redeemer  
Sing O earth His wonderful love proclaim  
Hail Him, hail Him highest archangels in glory  
Strength and honour give to His holy name  
Like a shepherd Jesus will guard His children  
In His arms He carries them all day long

*Chorus*

Praise Him, praise Him  
Tell of His excellent greatness  
Praise Him, praise Him  
Ever in joyful song

Praise Him, praise Him Jesus our blessed Redeemer  
For our sins He suffered and bled and died  
He our Rock, our hope of eternal salvation  
Hail Him, hail Him Jesus the Crucified  
Sound His praises, Jesus who bore our sorrows  
Love unbounded wonderful deep and strong

*Chorus*

Praise Him, praise Him Jesus our blessed Redeemer  
Heav'nly portals loud with hosannas ring  
Jesus, Saviour reigneth forever and ever  
Crown Him, crown Him Prophet and Priest and King  
Christ is coming over the world victorious  
Pow'r and glory unto the Lord belong.

*Chorus*

Closing Chorus: “Go now and live for the Saviour”

*Kurt Kaiser*

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Go now and live for the Saviour  
Go may this joy be your joy too  
Go may His presence ever guide you  
Go live this life the whole day through

**Scripture Texts: Psalm 119:105-107**

<sup>105</sup> Your word is a lamp to my feet  
and a light to my path.

<sup>106</sup> I have sworn an oath and confirmed it,  
to observe your righteous ordinances.

<sup>107</sup> I am severely afflicted;  
give me life, O Lord, according to your word.

**Luke 7 :1-17**

After Jesus had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. <sup>2</sup> A centurion there had a slave whom he valued highly, and who was ill and close to death. <sup>3</sup> When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him, asking him to come and heal his slave. <sup>4</sup> When they came to Jesus, they appealed to him earnestly, saying, “He is worthy of having you do this for him, <sup>5</sup> for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us.” <sup>6</sup> And Jesus went with them, but when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to say to him, “Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; <sup>7</sup> therefore I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed. <sup>8</sup> For I also am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my slave, ‘Do this,’ and the slave does it.” <sup>9</sup> When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, he said, “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.” <sup>10</sup> When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.

**Jesus Raises the Widow’s Son at Nain**

<sup>11</sup> Soon afterwards he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went with him. <sup>12</sup> As he approached the gate of the town, a man who had died was being carried out. He was his mother’s only son, and she was a widow; and with her was a large crowd from the town. <sup>13</sup> When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, “Do not weep.” <sup>14</sup> Then he came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, “Young man, I say to you, rise!” <sup>15</sup> The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. <sup>16</sup> Fear seized all of them; and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has risen among us!” and “God has looked favorably on his people!” <sup>17</sup> This word about him spread throughout Judea and all the surrounding country.

## **Meditation**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Years ago our family was camping in the Muskokas. We had a pop-up tent trailer at the time, so we had to go to the public restrooms to brush teeth and get ready for bed. One night, after the boys had gone to bed and Bruce and I had been enjoying the quiet evening, I made my way down the path, toothbrush in hand. There had been a heavy storm earlier in the day, so it was mucky. I was watching where I was putting my feet rather than looking ahead to see where I was going. As long as I stayed on the path, I knew I was headed in the right direction. Suddenly, I heard a loud crack and the unmistakable sound of a tree branch starting to bend. So I stopped and looked up to make sure I wasn't walking right into the path an accident waiting to happen. It was so dark I couldn't see where the branch was, so I kept walking toward the light of the sidewalk at the public building. I had only taken about three steps when a large branch let go and landed on the path behind me with a loud thud – right where I had been standing a few seconds earlier. Had I not moved toward the light at my destination, I would have broken the fall of the branch and sustained a nasty injury. A broken tree branch is one thing. A broken Jenn would not have gone over well with my family.

I hadn't taken a flashlight with me that evening because the building was just around the corner from our campsite, and I knew where I was going. The path was well worn and it was a straightforward walk. And, I could see the light over the sidewalk into the building from the time I stepped onto the well-walked path. Even if I had taken a torch, it wouldn't have stopped the branch from falling. Seeing it would not have altered the laws of physics. I had the light ahead to show me where to go, so I didn't need to come up with my own. I knew the way, and there was light to guide my steps. The branch just made for a good story.

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path (Psalm 119:105). There are few statements that give us such a pointed reminder of the significance and absolute necessity of the Scriptures for a believer's life. A lamp to our feet and a light to our path. That's pretty straightforward, isn't it. The Word is how we safely navigate this journey through earthly life, and keeps us focused on our destination. But a light on our path does not mean we only have to head toward the destination. It means we have to pay attention to where we are walking now.

Several years ago when my congregation wanted to renovate the front of the sanctuary, we noticed the original steps and chancel area were becoming somewhat dangerous. The carpet was worn enough that it was becoming slippery, there were no railings, and the carpet on the steps matched that of the floor, so it was difficult to judge where the edge of the step was because it all kind of blended together. I had just about gone over on an ankle a number of times because I was closer to the edge than I had realized.

While we were waiting for final approval on the plans, we knew we needed to do something to make it safer for everyone until the change could be made. I called my aunt who was an occupational therapist to ask her advice. One of the first things she said was, as we get older we need to pay more attention to where we put our feet. It wasn't just about making the front of the church safer, it was about making sure we were all paying more attention to where

our feet were. Especially for these wearing bifocals, which can throw off depth perception, we need to be aware of where we place our feet so we keep them on safe ground. Ever since my aunt said that, I have been more aware of my feet, or rather where I put them. I take an extra half second to look before I walk down stairs. When I walk outside at this time of the year, I'm more aware of patches of ice. In other words, I'm paying more attention to where I'm walking, and on what kind of surface. That knowledge becomes a light for my path, so that I can safely stay on course.

Can you imagine the light that glowed for the centurion whose servant was healed, and the woman whose son was raised to life by a word from Jesus? In the Gospel passage we shared today, the path of believing, trusting and following Jesus was illumined by an unearthly light, a Godly light, the light of God's Word. In the first story, the centurion already knows of the miracles Jesus could perform and in faith seeks his help from a distance, and Jesus grants the request because of that faith. In the second story Jesus encounters a need along the path he was walking, and without being asked he gave what was needed. In both stories we can only imagine what these people felt as Jesus shone his light of life and healing on them and their households.

We know the centurion already had faith in Jesus, such as Jesus had not found even among the people of Israel. He was on the path that is lit by Jesus' word. It was Jesus' word this man sought. He knew it would be enough to bring healing to his loved servant. Jesus knew the depth of faith in this man by *his* word of faithful trust in *Jesus'* word. We don't know what happened in the household after the servant was healed, but we do know he was healed. There must have been celebration. The centurion would have expressed gratitude for Jesus' healing power. Did the light of faith in Jesus spread throughout all those who lived and served in that household? Had it already permeated that family and its servants? How could it not, after such a miracle. I wonder if the centurion used it as a moment to gather them all in praise and thanksgiving.

There is no comment on the faith of the widow in the second story, but we do know Jesus was moved by compassion to help her. Her situation would have been grim. She no longer had a husband to support her, and now her son has died. This would have put her into societal turmoil. It was a dark situation for her. But Jesus shone his light onto the path she walked, literally, as he reached out and gave her son life again. And then the story tells us something amazing: *the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother*. It was astonishing enough that Jesus gave the young man life, but he did it for a greater purpose. He gave him life, and then gave him to his mother who needed him, who loved him, who was lost without him. It's a beautiful foreshadowing of the moment Jesus, hanging on the cross, gave the disciple he loved to his mother, and his mother to his disciple. The widow's darkness was lifted as Jesus gave her this gift. The light that would have burst onto the path of her life was unmistakable because there is no other like it. The story tells us the people were afraid, yet gave praise and glory to God for the miracle, saying God had looked favourably upon them, *God's people*. They refer to Jesus as a great prophet God has raised among them. They knew the God of Israel. Now, they also know Jesus, the light of the world, and their path of faith is enlightened by him.

I was reading an article about the story of the centurion's servant being healed, and it commented on the power of the word.<sup>1</sup> It isn't just the power of God's Word, although there is nothing more powerful, but there is also power in the word of the believer. The centurion is a man of authority, and his word has immense power over other people. But he recognizes Jesus' authority as being far greater than his. And so he draws on the biblical emphasis on the power of the Word in order to make his request. The writer of this article drew from Paul's letter to the Romans to point to the power of the spoken word: *So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ (Romans 10:17)*. This is why the Word of God, the Word made flesh, is a light in the darkness, a lamp for our feet and a light for our path. The Word is power for the believer, and it is also powerful when spoken by the believer. "The words that **we** speak have power too; power to harm or to heal, to create, to order our lives, and to share the salvation that Paul wrote of... What this story is trying to do is inspire just such a faith in us; faith in Jesus, faith that trusts that if Jesus says it, it is not simply promised, it *is*; it is accomplished." Jesus was amazed at the faith of the centurion, but the centurion's faith is rooted in his amazement of Jesus' power. Jesus' word was the light that led the centurion to believe the Lord could heal his servant, with just a word. "The Word which spoke creation into order— 'Let there be light!'—the same Word that stills the chaos of human life together... is the same Word that can speak life to the dying, and even the dead." It really is light that bursts into the darkness and leads us on life's way. As a friend and colleague recently wrote, "the Bible isn't just some book but contains wisdom, help and comfort for us on life's journey"<sup>2</sup>

We are in a time when it may seem like there is more darkness than light. I've noticed it's been a pretty grey winter, but maybe I'm just more aware of it than in other years, because life can seem a bit grey during these days of being locked in and locked down. The sunny days seem sunnier because I am so grateful for the natural brightness of the sun. It breaks through the cloud that hangs over the day when there is a bright blue sky because there is a bright shining sun. But it isn't just the sun that brightens our days. The sound of a kind voice breaks into the pandemic gloom. I love it when my dad calls to tell me about something he's seen on CNN, or to talk about an article he's read about the Toronto Raptors because he sounds so happy, and it brightens my day. It's like listening to his sportscasts again, and they were great! I guess it's a comfort to hear a little bit of home when he calls. The words of a loved one – a family member, a friend, a close colleague, a classmate – those words can make all the difference in our days. They can be the light that encourages us through the rest of the day. If these words from our earthly loved ones can make such a difference, imagine what it would have been like for the centurion and the grieving mother to hear the healing word of God spoken by the Word himself, the Word made flesh. What difference does it make for you on the dark, grey days to have God speak to you through his Word, the Word that is always at our fingertips and in our hearts.

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<sup>1</sup> The following ideas are gleaned from and adapted from Workingpreacher.org... Commentary on Luke 7:1-17 February 7, 2021. Written by Karl Jacobson, Sr. Pastor, Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, Minneapolis, MN.

<sup>2</sup> The Rev. David Berkers. Words of Comfort, February 3, 2021.

A Minister in the PCUSA wrote the following responsive prayer, inspired by Psalm 119:105-112. I'd like to close with these words, hoping they inspire us all to dig more deeply into the riches of God's Word. Let us pray...

Your word is a lamp to my feet, Lord. **Your word is a light to my path.**  
Though the world around me tosses and tumbles, **I hold fast to you.**  
Though I have doubts and worries and I wonder, **I hold fast to you.**  
Though my heart hurts, my spirit aches, and I lose my way, **I hold fast to you.**  
Though I encounter wickedness and hate seemingly around every corner, **I hold fast to you.**  
Your stories and your songs, O Lord- **They comfort me.**  
Your will and your way, O Lord- **They nudge me along.**  
Your presence and your promise, O Lord- **They give me hope.**  
Your world is my heritage and my heart. **And I will turn toward you forever.**  
I will hold fast to you. **And I will sing praises to your name!**<sup>3</sup>

Amen.

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<sup>3</sup>adapted from Psalm 119:105-112. Written by The Rev. Erin Counihan, pastor Oak Hill Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) in St. Louis, MO. Posted on RevGalBlogPals. <https://revgalblogpals.org/2017/07/13/thursday-prayer-126/>