

The Light that Changed the World

John 20:1-18

April 8, 2007

Easter Sunday

How many government bureaucrats does it take to screw in a light bulb? None. They contract out for things like that.

How many politicians does it take to change a light bulb? Four. One to change it and three to deny it.

How does an engineer change a light bulb? As long as the lighting level is within operational parameters, he doesn't.

How many Pentagon procurement officers does it take to change a light bulb? Look, for only \$87 billion, we can put up this chain of fluorescent satellites that will illuminate the whole planet.

How many lawyers does it take to change a light bulb? How many can you afford? You knew I was going to get around to a lawyer joke sooner or later, didn't you?

I got on my computer the other day and googled "Light Bulb Jokes." What came up was page after page of jokes. I spent about a half hour scrolling through the jokes, and these were the only ones that even came close to being OK to tell in church.

I always hate to predict the future, but I am going to go out on a limb here. I predict that within just a few years time, most if not all, of the light bulbs in our homes and offices will be CFL's. I just read that Wal-Mart has a new goal to sell one of these light bulbs to each of its 100 million regular customers during the next year. In fact, they have made a decision to replace all of the light bulbs in the ceiling fan displays in their stores with these new bulbs. They estimate that they will save \$6 million a year in energy costs.

If this is new to you, CFL stands for "Compact Fluorescent Lights." According to an article I found on the internet this past week which was posted by the U.S. Department of Energy and the Environmental Protection Agency (www.energystar.gov), these are bulbs that use 2/3 less energy than a normal bulb for the same amount of light, but last ten times longer. They generate 70% less heat and will save \$30 dollars in energy costs over the bulb's lifetime. The only problem is that they contain mercury, so disposal becomes a little bit of an issue. You can't just throw them in your neighborhood landfill.

I honestly don't know the science involved here (and I'm sure that there is another side to this), but they say that if every homeowner in the United States changed just one regular light bulb for a new CFL bulb, we could eliminate levels of pollution equivalent to that produced by 1.3 million cars or save enough electricity to power a city of 1.5 million people. On the surface, this sounds like a very simple solution to some very complex problems.

Last week following worship, Alex Taylor asked me why I tied a rope around my waist. There are two answers to that question: a simple one and a not-so-simple-one. I, being who I am, of course chose the not-so-simple answer.

The simple answer to that question is that I use that rope to hold my robe together. It's sort of like the joke, "Why does a firefighter wear suspenders? To keep his pants up." But I didn't tell him that. No, not me. Why would I give a simple answer when I had a chance to show him how smart I am?

I took him back to Medieval Monasticism and told him about men who gathered together into communities called monasteries. They wore simple robes like this one as a symbol that none was more important than any other. I then explained that my scapular evolved from the monastic aprons that they wore. I watched his eyes sort of glaze over at this point. He didn't care about any of that. He just wanted to know why there was a rope around my waist.

So, I am going to try to not make that mistake again. Let me be clear about his day. Here is the simple truth. This is the truth that we all need to hear, the truth for which the world waits, the truth on which hinges all of human history: Christ is risen. This is Easter, the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Today, we discover that the tomb was empty. The cross was empty. The stone has been rolled away. Our Lord has risen from the dead.

Last Christmas, we read the Gospel of John. He said that Jesus was the light that shines in the darkness. This light shining in the darkness cannot be extinguished. It cannot be defeated by the darkness. Today, we realize that the long week of Passion is over. Try as he might, Satan did not win the battle. Sin did not win. Evil did not win. The darkness did not win. The light that first shone on Christmas morning is still burning brightly, never to be snuffed out.

It is a light that doesn't require electricity. It is a light which is non-polluting. It is a light not made by human hands. It is a light that will never burn out. It is a light that cannot be changed, no matter how many hands attempt the job.

Early on that first Easter morning, Mary Magdalene ran to the tomb. It was still dark. Who knows why she went so early. But there she was, stumbling along in the darkness, trying not to trip and fall down, keeping an eye out for troublemakers, hesitating at every shadow. We don't know what possessed her to go alone. She knew that there was a great stone rolled in front of the tomb; a stone too large for her to move on her own. Still, she was driven to go, to be the first one there, to bow and cry and pray at the tomb of her Lord. In the darkness, she walked on.

She got there only to find the stone rolled back and the tomb empty. Mystified, frightened, sorrowful...so full of emotions...she ran back to tell Peter and the beloved Disciple. They must have thought she was a little bit crazy, but they ran off to the tomb

themselves and discovered that she had been telling the truth; it was empty. The burial clothes were there, but his body was gone.

Who knows what they were thinking. The passage reports that they didn't yet understand the prophecy that he must rise from the dead. So, bewildered or bothered or befuddled...who knows...they left and returned home.

It was Mary who stayed, weeping at the entrance to the yawning, cavernous tomb. Suddenly there were two angels there. She asked them where her Lord was. Turning around to see Jesus, but thinking that he was the gardener, she repeated her question, asking where the body of the Lord had been put.

Finally recognizing him for who he was, Mary was told by Jesus that he was on his way; ascending to God from whom he came. At that good news, she returned to the disciples with an air of certainty and announced, "I have seen the Lord." We have all seen the Lord today. The promise of Christmas has been proven by Easter.

What does the presence of this light of Easter morning mean? It means one thing. It is a very simple, yet incredibly profound truth. The price for our sins has been paid. We have become reconciled to God because of Christ's sacrifice. We have become heirs of heaven because Jesus has made us worthy of that home. What we have been dreaming about has come to pass.

A couple of weeks ago, I was alone one evening. Toni was in Nashville at the Annual Meeting of the General Board of Discipleship. I put a steak on the grill and ate it in front of the television. As that cholesterol-laden piece of beef began clogging my arteries, I watched the movie, "Coyote Ugly" that was playing on channel 15. If you have not seen this movie, don't bother. It's really not worth the three bucks it would cost you to rent it.

In the movie, the main character is named Violet Sanford. She is a young song writer who moves to New York City to be discovered. She winds up working at a bar that is owned by a hot babe, with a lot of other hot babes that dance on the bar for the customers as they sling drinks back and forth. To be perfectly honest with you, I didn't get to the end of the movie. I turned it off and picked up a book, so I don't know how it turned out. But there was one interesting bit of dialogue in it.

Violet arrived in New York City and went to a record producer's office. She introduced herself to the receptionist, and this is the dialogue that followed. I'm going to change it a little bit in order to make it acceptable for Easter morning.

Violet: Hi. I'm Violet Sanford. I just recently moved to New York and was wondering if you'd give my tape to one of your artists.

Wendy the receptionist: Violet, that is so cute! Now lemme tell you about me. My name is Wendy and I first moved to New York when I was 21 to be a dancer, but I broke my big toe...I got involved with an actor who dumped me to join the Peace Corps, so for

the last sixteen years I have been raising my daughter all by myself and then two weeks ago she tells me that she hates me more than any person on the planet. Now tell me how I can help you, please, because I am dying to make YOUR dreams come true.

As I watched that dialogue, I realized that neither Violet nor Wendy really understood the real power that makes dreams come true.

There was this fellow who had lived a really hard life. Nothing he did ever really worked very well. He drifted from job to job, never finding one that fit him. He drifted in and out of a few marriages, unable to make them work. His children abandoned him. His brothers and sisters stopped talking to him. His only friends were Jim, Jack, and Jose. That's Jim Beam, Jack Daniels, and Jose Cuervo.

Finally, he attempted suicide, but as in all the other areas of his life, he failed at that as well. The hospital chaplain visited him in his bed and asked him why he did it. He said it was because there was no good news. Surely, he said, if there was good news anywhere, someone would have told him about it.

The good news for today is that Easter matters. On Easter, someone has died and been resurrected to make our dreams come true. Easter is God's announcement that there is a solution to evil and sin. Jesus was redeemed from death and as such, redeems us all as well.

I don't know if these new CFL bulbs are the answer to what ails the planet. Perhaps they are part of the answer. Who knows? They may save us some money. They may help clean up the environment a little bit. They may be worth the cost.

But I do know that Jesus IS the answer to the problems that plague us. He is the light of the world who has come to save us. He is the Bright and Morning Star, the Sun of Righteousness.

As she stood by the tomb, first the angels and then Jesus himself asked Mary why she was weeping. That is a good question for us. Why do we still weep as if there has been no resurrection? Why do we still cry at missed opportunities? Why do we shed tears for hopes that have died? Why do we wail against the darkness?

The light of the world has come. He is risen. The time for weeping is over. Amen.