

Two households, both alike in dignity. In fair Verona, where we lay our scene. From ancient grudge break to new mutiny. Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean. From forth the fatal loins of these two foes. A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life. Whose misadventured piteous overthrows. Do with their death bury their parents' strife. The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love. And the continuance of their parents' rage. Which, but their children's end, nought could remove. Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage. The which if you with patient ears attend. What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend.

Did I just take you back to your high school days? That English teacher that forced you to read Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. What you just heard is the Prologue of this infamous play. The story of two feuding families who pay a devastating price. The Capulets and the Montagues, they just couldn't get along. So what could possibly go wrong when Romeo Montague and Juliet Capulet fall in love? Spoiler alert, they die.

Our reading today from the Gospel of John is also a Prologue. The prologue of his rendition of the story of Jesus. Spoiler alert, He dies too. It is this Prologue from John that will guide us through our 5<sup>th</sup> week of our sermon series, And the Band Played On. A musical look at the prayer of St. Francis Assisi and the first line of this prayer that asks God to make us instruments of peace.

This week we move on to the lute and the mission of being light in the world. Where this is darkness, let me sow light.

I know you're all anxious to know about the Lute. I will try not to disappoint. The lute looks a bit like a guitar. It's a stringed instrument with a neck and a deep round body enclosing a hollow cavity. There is usually a sound hole or opening in the body. The neck may be fretted (strips of material at intervals on the neck) or unfretted. Like a guitar, the strings are attached to pegs that can be tightened or loosened to control the sound.

Lutes are also among our earliest recorded instruments. Archeologists have discovered them as far back as 3100 BC in modern day Iran and Iraq.

While there are no Harpo Marx to give us a comical rendition of a lute piece, we have a beautiful classical rendition of it.

[PLAY LUTE VIDEO here](#)

Now that we've heard a lute we turn back to our topic of light. Lutes of Light. Light is a major theme of the Prologue in the Gospel of John.

One part that stood out to me was from vs 8: "He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light." This verse is not referring to Jesus it is referring to John the Baptist. A witness to the light. What a strange statement. Think about walking outside on a summer day and saying, "I would like to bear witness that this is a bright and sunny morning"? People might start wondering what you're putting in your coffee. Light needs no witness. It is self-evident. It bears witness to itself.

And yet there's the verse, as bright as noontime: "He came as a witness to the light." So John must be talking about some other kind of light – and he is.

Later, in **John 8:12** Jesus would said, "I am the light of the world." But He was grieved because men loved darkness more than the light. Nothing has changed, right? Darkness seems to get far more press than the light.

But without light it would be a mess. We wouldn't be able to see. Light is vital to life. In the Pacific Northwest, where it's overcast most days, many people suffer from light deprivation, affecting moods swings and invoking depression. There's actually a scientific name for this: "Seasonal Affective Disorder," or S.A.D. S.A.D. people with serve symptoms have to set up

special light panels in their homes to get heavy doses of illumination so they can be happy. We need light. We can't survive without it.

There's another kind of light that we need. Our souls depend on it. It's called SON Light. In our world, we might need witnesses to point out the SON Light. The SON Light has always been here. He's never gone away. But people who are in despair may be sitting in darkness, unable to see the Light. Da da da da... That's where you and I come in. While in one Gospel, Jesus said He is the light, in another He tells His followers, "You are the light of the world." Jesus is the true Light from heaven, but we are to be reflectors of that light.

I mean the True Light, the Light that came into the world, the Light to whom John the Baptist pointed and said, "He must become greater; I must become less." John was the first witness. He came to testify to the Light. We, too, have been called to this task, and so let's consider what a witness is and does.

A WITNESS HAS SEEN SOMETHING. We've seen enough courtroom movies to know that a witness is valuable because he or she has seen something – something crucial that could either convict a criminal or set an innocent person free. Our testimony of Jesus is crucial, too. We know whom we have believed.

A witness to the light is one who has seen Jesus. How have you seen Jesus personally? For me it was Jesus who lifted up a broken girl 11 years ago, put her on solid ground, and she stands before you today.

What about you? How have you seen Him?

Next A WITNESS HAS SOMETHING TO SAY. In a court of law, a witness isn't called to the stand just to sit there and look fashionable. He or she has testimony to share. **Psalm 71:24** says, "My tongue will tell of your righteous acts all day long."

A witness has something to say. Haven't you heard this before? "I don't have to talk about my faith; I just have to show my faith." Has that been you? Let me ask you this. Can you talk about your job or your favorite restaurant or that Super Bowl game last Sunday or the latest computer you bought. That is witnessing. Can you muster up the courage to talk about your faith?

Of course what we do is important. Jesus said so in **Matthew 5:16**: "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." But works are not enough. Talk isn't either. It requires both. It's not enough to talk, we must do. It's not enough to do, we must talk. Let me repeat that. Now say it with me.

Good news, we are not all called to witness in the same way. In the book, *Becoming A Contagious Christian*, the authors talk about how different personalities shape witnessing. A Christian professor might not use the same style as a minister on the streets of L.A. A homemaker in Texas might not use the same approach as a soup kitchen volunteer. Yet all can witness to the life-changing reality that is Jesus Christ.

Church family, you are all witnesses, you have something to say. If you let Him, Jesus will use your own style to say it.

Finally, **A WITNESS HAS A DANGEROUS JOB**. You are putting yourself on the witness stand. Be ready for a brutal cross-examination. Being a witness can open you up to danger. You might not have all the answers. **THAT'S OK!**

Being a Christian witness doesn't come easy for beginners. It may feel unnatural. There are things to be afraid of. Maybe ridicule and rejection. Maybe someone thinks you're intolerant or insensitive about sharing what you believe.

Being a witness for God has never been easy, just read the latter part of **Hebrews 11**. Those who testified of the true light were mocked, flogged, thrown into prison, forced to hide in caves, sawn in two. John the Baptist got his head lopped off for witnessing to the light.

Being a follower of Jesus is no guarantee of a life without fuss, or cross-bearing. I remember seeing a Facebook post around Thanksgiving. It was a church posting their holiday newsletter. On the back page was a huge caption that announced, “Christmas is for Christians and His Church.”

With all due respect, to that I say “NO!” Christmas isn’t just for Christians; a church isn’t just for Christians – we’re here to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. As John would later say, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son...” The ultimate evangelistic program occurred over 2000 years ago. It was in the form of a baby in a manger. That’s how God slipped into a world ruled by a pagan empire, a world of unfair taxes, oppressed masses and sickening religious phoniness. But why in the world did God make such a risky move? We come back to our Prologue...What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The Word became flesh to shed light. To make sons and daughters of light.

We are here to be the light of the world, a city on a hill. We cannot be hidden. We are here to shine, shine, shine! Shine forth truth, shine forth love, shine forth encouragement. That church family is who we are.

John Wesley’s opponents derisively labeled him an “enthusiast.” In the early years of America, people criticized revivalism – including some preachers. Today some might look at us as “charismatic” or “fanatical.” It might cost something to be the light. Pride, reputation, convenient lifestyles. But I promise you this. A good return for your investment.

We are witnesses who have seen something. We are witnesses who have something to say. We are witnesses who do not shy away from the dangers of the job.

Church family, God has embraced the world. Let’s get the word out. Let’s show the world how to move from darkness to light.

