

First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham
Alive in a Global Uprising: What is Your SLQ?
The Rev. Dr. John Judson
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Matthew 6:22-7:5;
Genesis 1:1-5

He had something that he wanted me to see. Keith was one of my best friends, and after high school we had gone separate ways. I had headed west to San Antonio for college and he had headed east, in the piney woods of east Texas for college. Now for those of you non-Texans, which I assume is most of you, the piney woods are dense forests like those in the UP. You can drive for miles and miles seeing nothing but trees and deer. Sometime during my freshman year I drove over to pay him a visit and as darkness fell, he invited me for a ride in order to show me this surprise. We were headed down some narrow two lane highway, the trees whipping by, barely able to see anything on a moonless night. The Keith said, "Watch this." He flipped a switch and it was daylight ahead of us. I wondered if the light was so bright it would knock the trees over. He glanced at me, smiled and said, "Aircraft landing lights." "Are they..." I began. He replied instantly, "No they are not legal. But aren't they great."

I think about Keith and his lights every time I hear Jesus say that we are to be the light of the world; that we are to be those who shine the light of God's love and justice into every dark place in the world. That where there is hate, we are to shine love. Where there is pain, we are to shine care. Where there is bullying, we are to shine protection. Where there are lies, we are to shine the truth. Where there is loneliness, we are to shine community. We are to be the light of God in a hurting world. Yet the question always arises, how are we to do that? How are we, ordinary people, supposed to be the light of God in the world? The answer is by increasing our SLQ; by increasing our Spiritual Light Quotient. Or if you prefer, our Spiritual Lumens Quotient. Our SLQ measures the amount of God's light we have available to share. For you see we cannot shine God's light into the world if we have not taken in the light. We cannot share what we do not have. This is what Jesus means when he speaks of our being full of light; that we can only be filled if our eyes, are open to seeing the light God offers.

The issue then becomes how do we do this? How do we open our eyes in order to receive the light? How do we increase our SLQ? Fortunately, Jesus offers us the answers in these pithy teachings we read this morning. So here goes.

First, we are to serve God. Often when we hear this statement, that we must serve God, what comes to mind is going out and doing things for others. We remember Jesus story about when we serve one of the least around us, then we are serving him, and by extension God. While that is spot-on, it is not what Jesus has in mind in this passage. Listen again to what he says. "No one can serve two masters." The issue is who sets the agenda for our lives. Who gives us our marching orders? Who is the one who will direct how we live? This is what a master does. And what Jesus wants us to see is that we are to give this place of honor in our lives over to God. In others words, we are to look to God...and nothing and no one else, to set the direction and boundaries of our lives. What happens when we do this is that we

look to God. We look toward God, and we begin to take in the light of God's love and mercy. We begin to take in the light of God's compassion and care. We begin to increase our SLQ. We become light bearers to the world capable of shining light into the dark places around us.

Second, we are to trust God. Jesus begins talking about trust by reminding us to not worry. "Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your..." and he tells us all the things we are not supposed to worry about. What I have found however is that when someone tells me not to worry, I spend as much time worrying about not worrying than I do worrying about what I was not supposed worry about...if you get my drift. So, I want to turn this around and get to the heart of it, which is that we are supposed to trust God. After all, God is the one who feeds the birds and clothes the grass...and loves us. Thus, we are to be people who, even in the most difficult of circumstances, trust that God is present, walking beside us, and caring for us. And as we begin to trust, our SLQ increases. It increases because to trust, we must be open. Because to trust we must be open to what God can and is doing in our lives. Because to trust is to receive from God what we cannot give to ourselves. It is having our arms wide open, palms up, waiting for God to shower light upon us. When we trust God, we become light bearers into the world capable of shining light into the dark places around us.

Third, we are to confess to God. In the final part of our reading this morning we hear Jesus telling people that they are not to judge others. While this may not appear to have anything to do with raising our SLQ, it actually does. For when we judge others we act as if we are God. We believe that we know what people think, why they do what they do, what are their motivations and that we have all the light we need to "fix" them. In essence we don't need God and so we pull a shade down across our spiritual eyes so that no light gets in, whether it is light from God or it is the light reflected in the other person. For what we need to remember is that one source of the light of God is other people. For every person has within them the light of God. It may be a dimly burning wick, or a spotlight, but it is there. So, when we judge, we blind ourselves to all the light that might make us capable of shining God's light into the world. This is where confession comes in. When we confess our pride, our arrogance or our fear, whatever it is inside that causes us to judge, we remove, as Jesus says, the log from our eyes. Isn't that a great image; a log in our eye. For when there is a log we can neither receive nor send light. But once we confess and remove the log we once again increase our SLQ and become light bearers to the world.

We live in a world that is desperately in need of the light of God in Christ. We need the light in our schools. We need the light in our places of work. We need the light in our communities. We need the light in our families. The challenge then is for us to increase our SLQ. It is to serve, trust and confess to God in such a way that the very light of God will come streaming into our lives, in order that we might shine it out again like aircraft landing lights...making a difference in this God's good creation. My challenge to you then is this, when you awaken each morning, sit on the edge of your bed, spread your hands apart and say to God, "Fill me with light, that I might be light to the world."