

Let your light Shine.

Sermon by Hayley Jones 17/1/21

2020 was a pretty tough year for me. I don't remember a single day when I didn't feel tired, so tired. The kind of tired that goes right down into your soul and no matter how much you sleep, you feel like you are waking up already exhausted. Do you know the kind of tired I'm talking about? So this year I'm making sure I slow down and rest. Sometimes for me that looks like reading or watching a movie.

Last week I watched a movie about a group of cave divers who explore deep under mountains in caves that have never been seen before. At one point, one of the characters talks about how important light is to deep cave divers, says they are obsessed with light and shows a necklace that his Father gave to him that he has turned into a light. Disaster strikes and they are trapped underground in the caves and tunnels with water pouring in. The way they came in is sealed shut so they have no choice but to follow the underground river deeper to try and find where it meets the sea and swim out that way. At one point the leader reminds them to save the batteries in their lights while they rest, so everyone turns off their headlamps. Absolute darkness descends on them, there is zero light available to them. Without their lights they cannot see a single thing, not even their hand in front of their face. As the journey continues the survival rate is low, there's only one guy left...He has almost reached the end, he has one

last swim to freedom and his light dies. He can no longer see the way out of the darkness. Pitch black darkness. Then this little light comes on, it's the light his father gave him! He continues along swimming through the cave, desperately trying to get out, only to have his oxygen run out. The poor kid can't get a break... and as he floats there for a moment, you can see the look of fear and devastation on his face, the complete lack of hope that he will ever get out of the cave, and he turns his light off, resigned to his impending death. But as he does the camera pans out and you see him realise he can see light, light from the sun, glimmering from the other end of the tunnel! He is almost out! He summons the last of his strength and swims on, breaking through the surface, into the sunlight for the biggest breath of fresh air! He made it! He escaped the darkness. The light his Father gave him and the light shining from the sun led him through the darkness and shone in the distance to give him hope.

I wonder if you have ever felt like you are running out of air, drowning deeper and deeper into the darkness than you have ever been before? When the darkness has you surrounded and that's all you can see, you're trapped, and you can't see the way out and you've lost all your hope, the pain is too great.

Maybe 2020 was a tough year for you too.

Perhaps you lost a job or suffered financial insecurity.

Maybe you had a falling out with someone or lost a meaningful relationship.

Maybe you lost your reputation or your dignity?

Maybe you were the subject of idle gossip or hurtful rumours.

Perhaps you relapsed into old habits or addictions or gave into temptation?

Maybe you have been suffering with a depression and anxiety?

Maybe you have family and loved ones interstate or overseas who are doing it tough due to the Covid virus?

Perhaps you lost all sense of purpose and direction about what you were supposed to be doing with your life and where you were supposed to be?

Maybe you've been battling for your health, you've cried out to God for healing and you've watched other people get their miracle but there's been no change in your condition?

Maybe you feel completely isolated from your friends and family and it feels like no one understands you at home, your parents especially!

Perhaps your plans got completely turned upside down, you were supposed to be on a holiday or overseas, on a cruise, or seeing loved ones whom you miss dearly?

Or maybe you don't know Jesus and you've never felt the power and beauty of his presence and his unconditional love.

Or maybe like me you lost someone and for a while there, it felt like the sun went out. That the darkness that is grief threatened to grab you and drag you down into the deepest of underground caves where no light can penetrate.

Then take heart, my friend, there is a way out.

Psalm 119: 105 "Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path."

That's how we get out of the darkness. Remember the light that led the young man through the darkest part of the cave was the light that his Father had given him and the light from the sun that sparkled in the distance! Your Father has given you his light too, it lives in you, the same light he gave his Son! We have the word of God to guide us out of the darkness and light up our way and we have the light in us, to light up the way for others and to give them hope and lead them out of the darkness and into the light.

Jesus understood the darkness that humans would face here on earth and in the Sermon Jesus gave on the Mount, from Matthew chapter 5 he tells us in verse 14-16 **"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before**

others, that they may see you good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven”.

Did you hear that? Jesus wants you to let your light shine so that you can give light to everyone around you. He doesn't want you to shine Eli's light, or Matthews light, or Greg's light, that's their job. He wants you to shine your light, however that looks and however he says to do it!

Hands up if you've ever been on the highway to Pt Augusta or Adelaide in the middle of the night when there's no moon? What about when there's no moon and there's a cloud cover? I'll give you a hint.... It's very, VERY dark! We noticed it made people slow right down; they were unsure and fearful about driving on a road that was well travelled and ordinarily easy to drive on. How easy it is for us to become fearful and lost in the dark.

I looked at Liam and said to him, “I wonder how dark it would be right not if I turned the lights off?”

But as I looked back to the road I saw it, that distinctive orange glow in the sky that lets you know that Whyalla is near! We could see home! The light from the town was shining into the dark night and guiding us back safely towards home. I was no longer focussed on the darkness; I wanted to draw closer to the light, I wanted to be home.

As I got closer I thought about how it wasn't just one light that lit up Whyalla, I could start to see lots of little lights, and

they weren't all in one place, they were spread out all over town. It's the same with us. We are here today but it's not enough to let your light shine here on Sunday mornings then go out into the world for the rest of the week and put it under a bowl. That's like actively encouraging the darkness! We need to take the God given light we have inside each and every one of us and let it shine wherever we go! Into our homes, our schools, our workplaces, to the homes we visit, the places we shop, the places we go walking, driving or riding and everywhere else in between.

I'm going to ask the ushers to close the curtains and Greg to switch of the lights for a minute.

Now this isn't as dark as the deep cave divers experienced, it not even as dark as it was the other night when Liam and I were in the car, but it is uncomfortable dark. Could you imagine a world without God's word being a lamp for our feet and a lamp for our path? A world without the light of Jesus shining across the land, carried by each of his people? I don't know about you but that's not a place I want to live in.

Now if Greg lights on. I'm going to invite the worship team to put a candle on the map and then to come and play for us, You can put your candle on any of the places we talked about earlier, your house, a friend's house, your work or school, and anywhere you can possibly go and let your light shine. Now I invite you all to come and chose a candle, to switch it on and stick it on the map we have of Whyalla. I need to ask

you all to be mindful of keeping your distance, to file up this aisle and back down that one against the wall after you have placed your candle, starting with the back row and then make our way forward. Matthew is going to hand you a piece of paper for you to take home. I want to encourage you to spend some time with the Lord this week thinking about what it means to shine your light and what does that look like for you, because everybody's will be different. Then I want you to put it somewhere to remind you to always let your light shine.

Some of the ways you may come up with could include loving others, raising our kids right, giving an encouraging word or lending a hand to someone in need, doing our best at work, or smiling at a stranger, maybe paying for the petrol or groceries of the person in front of you. Make someone a cup of tea, invite someone over for dinner, sit with someone who is lonely even if the other kids judge you, stand up for the kid who's being bullied and never be the bully. Forgive someone completely, even when they've hurt you so badly, drop the argument, even when you know you're right because letting your light shine and bring joy and hope is more important than being right. Now more than ever, in a time when we can't hug each other and social distancing is needed do we need to shine our light. Even if you are away from your loved ones and you can't be there for them physically, there are still things you can do to shine your light and point people to Jesus. We all remember how much fun zoom was right? Have

a zoom call with someone, ring them on the phone, send a message or a care package or a letter, pray with someone!

Because what if we do? What if we get this right? Imagine if the light people saw on their way into Whyalla was brighter than the lights of GFG. Imagine a world where every Christian truly let their light shine for Jesus. Imagine if we were all operating in a lighthouse fashion, leading people away from the dangerous rocks to the safe harbour of the Kingdom of Jesus, because make no mistake, there are people out there and they are lost in the dark and no one is going after them! Who will go out into the darkness and get them, who will use their light to guide them to the safety of Jesus?

Could you imagine how bright the light of Jesus would be in the world if we all let our light shine so the world will see our good deeds and glorify our Father in heaven.