Luke 8:16-21
Listening, Doing, Belonging

Have you ever been afraid of the darkness and longed for the light?
I don't think I have ever longed for the light
More than the night of the Black Saturday Bushfires
About 80 of us from this church were on the evening congregation camp
We were staying at the ESA campsite and were told to evacuate to Alexandria
Which is a good thing because the ESA campsite was destroyed by the fires that evening
And a number of people died that night in Marysville
But when we got to Alexandria we were trapped
All roads were cut off by fire
And the town was under ember attack
We managed to get some supplies from the local IGA
But the town was shrouded in smoke and darkness because the power was cut off
That was a long dark night wondering what was going to happen to us
I don't think many of us got much sleep that night
But how good was it when the light of dawn came the next day
Because with the light came hope and rescue
All of us were able to drive back to Melbourne safely later that day
Light when you are in darkness is so good
And that's what Jesus thinks too from this passage from Luke's gospel

Two points I want to make from this passage
Firstly, listen to the light in verses 16-18 and
Secondly, Belonging means hearing and doing in verses 19-21

Firstly Listen to the Light
Now that sounds a bit strange to say listen to the light
But it makes sense in the context, let's see what Jesus is talking about
Last week, Clint looked at the first half of Luke chapter 8
And the parable of the sower and the soils
And that whole passage was about different responses to the word of God
Jesus likened the word of God to seed
Seed that was scattered onto different soils.
But this week, Jesus continues on the same subject of God's word
But this week he changes the analogy
God's word is like a lamp or even a lighthouse
Shining brightly in the darkness

Verse 16
16 "No one, after lighting a lamp, covers it with a basket or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a lampstand so that those who come in may see its light.

Jesus' first point is quite straightforward
A lamp is designed to shine
Just as a lighthouse is built to lead ships safely to shore in the darkness
It would make no sense then to cover the light with a tarp
It defeats the very purpose of the light
And so God's word is intended by God to illuminate our lives
To shed light on how we are to live and relate to God and to others

I wonder if Jesus had in mind Psalm 119 when he was teaching this parable
Especially verse 105
Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path
Psalm 119 is the longest psalm in the Bible
And it's all about God's word
A word that teaches us how to live with wisdom in the face of suffering or opposition
A word that shows us how to delight in God and His salvation

Verse 17
17 For nothing is concealed that won't be revealed, and nothing hidden that won't be made known and brought to light.

God's word is a light that exposes sin.
We fall short of God's law because of our sin
And God sees what we hide from others
He sees the hidden desires of our hearts
Our secret motivations and our concealed sin
And God will not let this continue

In fact Jesus described his own coming into the world as the light that exposes the darkness
This is John chapter 3
19 This is the judgment: The light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone who does evil hates the light and avoids it, so that his deeds may not be exposed. 21 But anyone who lives by the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be shown to be accomplished by God.

And here we have the same light
With two very different outcomes
The light of God's word embodied in Jesus
for some, is either a spotlight that exposes evil
Or for others, it is a light of refuge that glorifies God

Think of that lighthouse
A ship in a storm finds comfort and safety in that light
So someone overwhelmed by suffering,
Someone weighed down by shame and guilt over their sin
Can find comfort in the promises of Jesus

But think of a spotlight
A spotlight that exposes the stealing and murderous acts of a fox
Someone who commits sin against God and against others
and hopes to get away with it in the darkness
Will one day be exposed Jesus
And will not escape the final judgement of God

God's word is a polarising light isn't it?
You either flee to it for safety
Or you flee from it to hide
Jesus' application is found in verse 18

18 Therefore take care how you listen. For whoever has, more will be given to him; and whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken away from him."

Because God's word is light
Jesus is saying there is way of listening to the light that either leads to growth
Or leads to spiritual loss
You can be familiar with the stories of Christianity and still not submit to Christ
You can hear sermons at church for years and still not pay any attention to God
Jesus gives both a warning and a promise
If you come to the Bible with an openness,
A willingness to grow, to learn wisdom
To repent when you see your sin for what it is
To love and trust Jesus more
Then God will give you more of what you want
But if you come to God's word with a stubborn pride,
A lazy selfishness
A self-righteous heart
Then God will take away what little desire there was to begin with.

In fact if we use the language of Jesus in this parable
These are the ways in which we try to conceal the light
as though it had no worth to shine into our lives

Let me give you three examples
We can treat the Bible like the Pharisees
We listen to the words of Jesus, only to judge and refute and defend ourselves
We resist the claim that Jesus has on our lives as Lord
We use the bible to say that Jesus is irrelevant and maybe even harmful

Here's another way we conceal the light
We say that the bible is full of secret code, hidden meanings
If only we count the chapters and verses in a certain way
Or if we try to match the hidden meaning
With certain historical events then we will really know the truth
Meanwhile we ignore the plain meaning of the text
Like be humble like Jesus, love your enemies
Pray at all times, love Jesus more than you love money or sex

And finally another way we conceal the light
Is that we treat the bible like a fine bottle of wine
We appreciate it, but only to be brought out on special occasions
In the right company – for church, for easter, Christmas
Or we choose the bible passages we want to believe in and ignore the rest
The bible is to be tasted and judged for the palate
Rather than drunk in deeply for life
We have so many bibles in our houses that go unread
So many bible apps on our phones that go unused

What did Jesus say?
Take care how you listen
It's the same thing he said after the parable of the sower in verse 8

Let anyone who has ears to hear…listen.
Jesus wants us to do some work
He spoke in parables as a sift
To many in the crowd Jesus was just an interesting storyteller
A way to kill a few hours of the day for most of the crowd
But to those who really wanted to understand
They stayed behind and asked for the meaning of the parables
Jesus readily give them the meaning
After all these are the words of the Messiah - The Son of God
Commands and promises that bring the light of life
His word is a treasure of immense worth
If only you would turn to him and really listen
And ask him for wisdom and understanding.

Joshua Bell is one of the world's greatest violinists
And he did an experiment that you can watch on YouTube
He dressed in plain clothes and a baseball cap
And stood in a subway station in Washington DC
And he pretended to be a busker
Except the instrument he played was a Stradivarius worth more than 3.5 million dollars
Two days earlier
Bell played in a sold-out concert hall in Boston
Where people paid a hundreds and even thousands of dollars a ticket to hear him play
Same extraordinary talent
Same expensive violin
Except a free concert for those walking by to catch a train
After 43 minutes
Out of 1097 passers by
27 people gave him money totalling $32.17
7 people stopped briefly to listen
1 person recognized him and spoke to him
Can you imagine that?
How many people missed out on something extraordinary?
One of the best musicians in the world
Playing one of the finest instruments in the world
All because they did not stop to listen
How much more are we missing out
When we don't stop to listen to the light

In Communist China during the 10 years of the cultural revolution
Bibles were confiscated or burned by the authorities
And if you were caught owning one, you could be beaten or imprisoned.
But the bible was so precious to the house churches
That believers would hide them in floorboards and flowerpots
Or they would separate their pages and share them amongst different households
If some were discovered then they wouldn't lose the whole bible
Christians memorised large sections of the bible in case their bibles were taken
They started hand copying sections of the bible so there would be more copies
To share with others
Eventually, the gospel flourished in China

Tens of millions have come to follow Jesus
Why? Because Christians listened to the light
They cherished the words of God as if their lives depended on it
They held onto the promises of Jesus even in the darkest periods.
And you know what, you can't stop the light of God's word
The Amity Printing company based in Najing is one of the largest bible printers in the world having printed more than 300 million bibles.

But if the word of God has brought you out darkness
And into the light of Christ Jesus
Then one of the natural results is that you want others to know the light
And to be rescued from darkness
Here we are reading from the New Testament in English
Which is an incredible blessing given that it was written in Koine Greek
We are spoilt for choice with so many different versions in English – many of them good
But it wasn't always the case
Do you know who was the first to mass produce the New Testament in English?
A bloke called William Tyndale

He was a Bible scholar and linguist and clergyman
He was a leading figure in the Protestant Reformation
And the first to translate the New Testament from the original Greek
Rather than from Latin which had been done before
He clashed with a very learned Catholic clergyman who said that
"we are better without God's laws than the Pope's' to which Tyndale replied
"I defy the Pope and all his laws; and if God spare my life, ere many years, I will cause a boy that driveth the plough to know more of the Scripture than thou dost."

Can you see what is behind that statement of Tyndale's
God's word is just as relevant for a farm hand
And can be understood by him because God's word is light
A light that has come to make things clearer
Unlike man-made teachings

In 1526, his translation of the New Testament was published on the printing press
In a form of modern English understood by most people
Tyndale for his efforts was defrocked as a clergyman
Villainised for his translation that was considered anti-Catholic
And eventually executed for his views which were too much like Luther's.

His final words recorded before death were "Lord, open the King of England's eyes"
A prayer to see the light of God's word
A prayer that was answered
Within 75 years, the first authorised version of the whole bible was printed
That came to be known as the King James Version of 1611.
Which drew heavily from Tyndale's translation
16 "No one, after lighting a lamp, covers it with a basket or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a lampstand so that those who come in may see its light.

Why is it that we teach the bible at this church verse by verse?
So that people can listen to the light

Why do we study the bible in growth groups, at Sunday School or Youth Group
So that we can keep listening to the light
So many of you here, are involved in sharing the light with those who have yet to hear it
Why do kids hear the bible taught at Get Some Fun?
Some of them so that they can listen to the light for the first time in their lives
And over the years, we have had people in our congregation serve with Wycliffe
To do the very thing that Tyndale did, except for people of other languages
To translate the bible in their own tongue
A work that takes many years
Why? To share the light that rescues people from the darkness
That people might see Jesus for who he really is – Saviour and Lord
And that they too can belong to Him.

This brings us to our second point
Belonging means Hearing and Doing

Verse 19
19 Then his mother and brothers came to him, but they could not meet with him because of the crowd. **20** He was told, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you."
21 But he replied to them, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear and do the word of God."

On face value, what Jesus is saying is very offensive in his culture
The importance of family in an honour-shame culture could not be understated
Honour of your parents was also commanded by God in the law
And now Jesus seems to be valuing the crowd around him
Over and above his own family
I mean hasn't Jesus heard that expression

Blood is thicker than water
Family comes first
What is going on here?

Here's a bit more background
In the same incident in Mark's gospel
Mark explains why Jesus' family came to see him
Mark chapter 3
20 Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. 21 When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."

Jesus' family thought he'd lost the plot
They came to stop his ministry and take him home
They saw that he was so busy he didn't even have time to eat
And that he was coming into increasing conflict with the religious authorities
Things that were not good for Jesus or for their family's reputation and status
Not even his own family could see the true identity of Jesus as the Messiah
They could not see Jesus as the Son of God, carrying out His Father's will

How hard it must have been for Jesus that not even his blood

Understood why he had come
And yet this did not stop Jesus honouring his mother Mary
He loved her and took care of her
In this beautifully poignant moment as Jesus is dying on the cross
He provides for his mother knowing that he will soon return to God
This is John chapter 19

[26] When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby (that's John), he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," [27] and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

Jesus is not saying that we shouldn't honour our parents or love our families
But he is making a profound point about the priority of our relationships
Jesus first
Then those who listen to Jesus by hearing and doing the word of God
And then our families after that

In other words
Blood is thicker than water
But the blood of Christ is thicker than blood

It's funny how the first thing we notice is Jesus marginalizing his family
When in fact, the thing we should notice is Jesus extending his family
He's opening up the invitation to anyone who will listen
Regardless of your race, your social position, your level of education, your gender, your age
You may have been rejected by your own family
But you are welcome to join His
How good is that?
But there is one condition, that you trust and obey God's word
That is what it means to be a hearer and doer of God's word

It means trusting in Jesus
And obeying his commands.
Jesus is not talking about slavish legalism that somehow earns our place in his family
If we believe in Jesus' name
he gives us the right to become children of God according to John 1
This is an offer of grace not works
Jesus did the heavy lifting to bring us into his family
He shed his blood on the cross for us to pay for our sin
But obedience flows out of thankfulness to Jesus
We must persevere in doing God's word
We must not think that it applies to everyone else and not ourselves

Now eventually the brothers and mother of Jesus came to believe in him
We see this in chapter 1 of the book of Acts
In fact James and Jude – two brothers of Jesus came to be leaders in the early church
And this is what his brother James wrote in chapter 1 of his letter

[22] But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. [23] Because if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like someone looking at his own face in a

mirror. [24] For he looks at himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of person he was. [25] But the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer who works—this person will be blessed in what he does.

Today, you have witnessed young people profess their faith
Or getting baptized in the name of Christ
These are your brothers and sisters in Christ
None of them are Christians by birth
But rather they have been raised to follow Jesus
Each one of them today have made a choice for themselves to follow Jesus
They've made a commitment to persevere in hearing and doing God's word
What will you choose to do with God's word?

This is a photo I took when I went to visit one of our missionary families
The Shorts in West Africa
Every morning just before dawn, Warwick would read the bible with Ardo
In fufulde – Ardo's mother tongue
Ardo is a Fulani chief who left Islam and became a follower of Jesus
When I took that photo, it was just before dawn
It was still dark outside
And I thought of that verse from Psalm 119
Your word is a lamp to my feet
A light to my path
For Ardo, God's word really is more precious than anything
It has brought him hope and freedom
It has brought him forgiveness and peace
Ardo has been threatened for his faith
The Muslim leaders have said to him
That they will not bury his body if he continues to believe in Jesus
A great dishonour for Muslims
And Ardo told them,
What does it matter what you do with my body
For I will be with God.
When you listen to God's word like Ardo
God's word is more precious than anything
The day before I took that photo
I met Ardo for the first time

And we were taught that when you meet a Fulani chief
You have to kneel down and lower your gaze out of respect
And I started to kneel down but Ardo grabbed my arm and pulled me back up
And he embraced me and said
"Any brother of Dawda (what he called Warwick) is a brother of mine"
Isn't it amazing, that I a Malaysian born Australian
And he a Fulani of West Africa
Could be brothers bound together by the blood of Christ
Sharing eternity with Jesus one day
Listen to the light
Hear and do God's word and you will belong to Christ's family
Share the light with others so that they will be welcome by him too.