

SERMON: Let Your Light Shine

TEXT: Matthew 5:13-20

“This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine. This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine, let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.” For many of us this is probably one of the first things we learned about living our faith and how to be disciples of Jesus.

In my young adult years, before I went to seminary, I directed the Cherub Choir made up of preschoolers at my church. One day, while we were singing this song, one little boy chose to hold up his *second finger* rather than his first to represent his little light. I think it was completely innocent. I didn’t detect a hint of mischief on his face, but I was also struggling to keep a straight face, so it’s hard to say.

Of course, if the gesture had been a conscious choice, it certainly would have defeated the message and taken away from the power of the words being sung.

The symbol of light is used in so many ways in our society, and in many of the major religions of the world. Sometimes when I'm preparing a sermon or teaching a Bible Study, I use the symbols of a question mark, a lightbulb, and an arrow to identify the questions we have, the new ideas or understandings we've gained, and the words or phrases that seemed to target our hearts and speak to us directly. Well, both this teaching from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount as well as today's lesson from Isaiah are like an arrow to my heart. They hit me right where I live.

It used to be a nice little song, *This Little Light of Mine*. So easy to sing and do that even little children could do it. Put a smile on your face, lift your hand in the air and shine the light of Jesus. But we learn as we grow older that nothing is as easy as it

seemed when we were younger. To be the salt of the earth and light of the world is no small task in a world like ours.

Let's hear these verses as Jesus might say them today, from Eugene Peterson's *The Message*: *"Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be salt - seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You've lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage. Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand - shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven."*

Another Bible scholar also helped to explain the imperative of Jesus' words: "*You are the salt of the earth* suggests that Jesus gives...his disciples a distinctive capacity to elicit goodness on the earth. Like salt, which is used to alter or enhance the tastes of food, the disciples' capacity to elicit goodness as they participate on earth should be of profound consequence.... The danger for disciples is that they may lose that capacity by forgetting that they are to disorder the status quo by valuing those who are dispossessed, caring for those who suffer loss, seeking to do justice, showing mercy, having integrity, being peacemakers, and courageously standing for what they believe. Disciples who do not engage in such practices that humanize life on earth will be like salt that has lost its taste." (Marcia Y. Riggs, *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 1*, p. 332)

As his disciples of today, Jesus gives us the *capacity* and the *directive* to be salty, to be courageous, to elicit goodness on earth.

This is where I feel that arrow to the heart. Too often I feel as though I'm not very salty. I'm afraid that I have gone bland. I tend to hide my light under a bushel basket. I don't perform well in a debate or an argument, because I can't think that fast. I can't find the right words to say at the moment. So instead of speaking up to advocate for those whose voices are ignored, I usually just clam up and walk away feeling ashamed.

But Jesus is calling all of us to step out of our comfort zones, to ramp up our discipleship beyond Sunday worship and daily prayer. It is not enough to hear the challenging words of Jesus and then go back to our normal, comfortable lives.

Especially as we move closer to the season of Lent, we need to feel the sting of Isaiah's words as he speaks for the Lord and scolds the people for their empty sacrifices and meaningless discipline of fasting. "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the

oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house, when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and [God] will say, *Here I am.*"

Some people do get saltier as they age, in terms of speaking out and not being afraid to say what's on their mind. But, more often than that, as we lose energy and our limitations increase, our light can begin to fade. Still, there are small things we can do, and when we do them together, can make a big difference. When many small lights are shining all at once, they can light up a whole room.

I heard a story on the news awhile back, about some people who were riding the subway in New York City. Their mood was quiet and tense, as they began to notice that every ad on the walls above them had a black swastika scribbled on it. Finally, one man announced that hand sanitizer will remove permanent marker. Other passengers immediately began digging in their backpacks and briefcases and purses for hand sanitizer and tissues. They all got to work removing the swastikas and erasing the message of hate that surrounded them.

Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." (<https://www.brainyquote.com>)

Jesus Christ, who was executed on a cross for opposing and challenging the religious leadership of his day, said this: "LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

We must no longer be bland Christians, hiding our light under a bushel. We've grown from the time when we sang, "This little light of mine." So, our light needs to grow, too, stronger, brighter, higher. More than just proclaiming Jesus as the light of the world, we need to live into and live up to his words which proclaimed, "YOU are the light of the world."

LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE! To the glory of God!

AMEN.