

Where Is YOUR Light Shining?

Genesis 1:1-5

John 1:1-5

John 8:12

Matthew 5:14-16

Sermon Preached by Pastor Rob Fulton

**First United Presbyterian Church
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"I am the light of the world," Jesus said. *"Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life."* (John 8:12)

"YOU are the light of the world," Jesus said. *"Let your light so shine before people, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."*

"I am the light of the world...YOU are the light of the world."

So which is it? Is JESUS the light of the world as John's gospel proclaims? Or are WE the light of the world as Matthew's gospel makes it know? Is JESUS the one who shines in the darkness and the darkness has never put him out? Or are WE the ones who are called to shine for the whole wide world to see?

Which is it?

The answer, of course, is YES!

Jesus IS the light of the world. The light that was in the beginning with God. The light that God spoke into creation. The light that was divided from the darkness. The light that came from the life that was for all people. The light that shines in the darkness such that no amount of darkness can or will ever overcome it. JESUS is the light of life...and whoever follow him will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.

But not only will we HAVE the light of life, Jesus says we will also BE the light of life. The light of the world. The light that cannot be hid. The light that shines for all to see such that by seeing OUR light...such that by seeing OUR good works...glory may be given to our Father who is in heaven. Because we are his followers...HIS light becomes OUR light. WE are the light of the world, Jesus says.

But if that's the case...if what Jesus says is true...and I really do believe it IS true...then here's my question for you this morning. Where is YOUR light shining? Where are YOU being the light of the world? Where is it that YOUR light is shining such that people see YOU and give glory to our Father who is in heaven? Does anyone SEE your light? Does anyone KNOW you are a child of God...a follower of Jesus Christ? Can they tell that by the way you live your life...by the way you shine your light into the darkness of our sometimes dark and dreary world?

If I were to ask your neighbors...or the people you work with...or one of the cashiers down at WalMart where you just checked out with all your groceries...would THEY know you are the light of the world? Would THEY be able to see your light shining?

Oh, some of them would probably know you go to church on Sundays. And some of them might even know you go to First United Presbyterian Church and that you teach Sunday School...or help with VBS...or sing in the choir...or serve as a Deacon...or help with the Election Day Luncheon. But would they KNOW you are a Christian? Would they be able to SEE Christ's light shining in you? Would they be able to LOOK at you and say, *"Now HE...now SHE...is the light of the world! The world is a brighter place because Judy's in it...because Bob is around...because Sue let's Christ light shine!"*? Would anyone be able to say that about you?

In our scripture passage for today, Jesus speaks about his followers...that's US...being *"the light of the world"* and how we are to let our light shine in our world for the sake of others. He

reminds us that a city set on a hill is there for everyone to see. And in the same way, he tells us, no one lights a candle and then sticks it under a bucket, but instead puts it on a lamp stand so everyone in the house can see. I mean REALLY! What's the point of lighting a candle that no one is ever going to see?

Methodist preacher and teacher Maxie Dunnam, in his book That's What the Man Said, says that the challenge for us as Christians...as followers of Jesus...is to stop pretending to be less than we are and to **humbly, yet unashamedly, allow the light that Jesus has given us to shine forth in our lives...to shine forth in such a way that when people look at US they may give glory NOT to us...but to God who is not ONLY in heaven...but in US as well.**

And then Dunnam goes on to say that there are at least two ways in which Jesus calls us to BE the light. **One is to let our light shine BEFORE others and not AT them.** To be sure, there are those who call themselves "Christians"...who boldly proclaim their loyalty and love for Jesus...but who, because of their self-righteous egos and judgmental attitudes ending up BLINDING others from seeing God. Because they shine the self-perceived brightness of their OWN light directly AT other people...demanding that others believe...or act...or live exactly as THEY do...they end up driving people AWAY from God and God's son rather than drawing those people TO God and to Jesus. And you know EXACTLY the kind of people I'm talking about.

Some of them are **In-Your-Face Christians**. These are the hard sell, confrontational types...the ones who, upon meeting you, demand to know: "*Are you saved?*" and then immediately begin haranguing you about how to GET saved so that you avoid burning in the fiery torment of hell. Or the type that stop you on the sidewalk or knock on your door and shove a flier in your face insisting that you repent NOW...for the end is near! In Your Face Christians who BLIND people to God's gracious Good News.

And then there are the **Holier-Than-Thou Christians**...the smug, self-righteous types. They have exchanged their priestly, Pharisaic garments for more contemporary clothing, but their hearts are just as judgmental. They make it very plain that you probably couldn't live up to their level of spirituality and perfection, so you might as well not try. You know the type, don't you? They are the chronic critics who seem to have a problem with anything and everything that they happen not to agree with and then look down their long pointy noses at those who differ with them because THEY obviously know what's right and YOU are obviously wrong for seeing it differently. "*Tsk...tsk...tsk*" they say, shaking their heads in self-righteous pity for those who just don't "*see the light*". Holier-than-thou Christians who BLIND others from giving glory to our Father who is in heaven.

Of course then, there are also what we might call **Cosmetic Christians**. These are the Christians who wear only the VENEER of being a follower of Christ. Their Christianity is "surface only" and doesn't really change their character and values...nor their behavior. They're the ones that non-church going people call *hypocrites* because they only wear the mask of Christianity...going to church on Sunday...singing in the choir...serving as an usher - but then going out and cheating their neighbors Monday through Friday. If we only WEAR the mask of Christianity on Sunday without also LIVING our faith Monday through Friday how can we help but be called *hypocrites*? How can we HELP but blind others to the Good News of God's grace and love?

Joe Aldrich, author of the book Life-Style Evangelism, put it like this: "*Christians should decide to BE the good news before they go trying to SHARE the good news.*"

"*Let your light shine before others that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*" To be sure, Jesus calls us to let our light shine BEFORE others, and not AT them.

AND Jesus calls us to be the light **WITHOUT being showy**. In other words, to shine so that their glory goes to GOD and not to ourselves.

Now, to be sure, there are those of us who take that admonition to heart. We are SO reluctant to call attention to ourselves that we refuse to let our light shine AT ALL for fear of being showy. We're just not comfortable with sharing our faith. We're just not comfortable with doing things that will attract attention. But that's NOT what Jesus was talking about. He was talking about SHINING OUR LIGHT in such a way that instead of drawing the attention to OURSELVES...it

gives the glory to God. Let me show you what I mean.

There's an old story...a fable...maybe even one of Aesop's Fables...I don't know where it's from. But it's the story of a contest between the wind and the sun to see which of them would be able to get a man to remove his overcoat first. Well, the wind fully blustered and blew around the man as he walked across a field. But that just made the man pull his coat tighter around himself and eventually button it all the way up under his chin in spite of the wind howling and swirling noisily around him. And the wind eventually surrendered in disgust.

And then the sun took over and simply began to smile warmly and gently on the man until, before long, the man voluntarily unbuttoned his coat...opened it up...and finally took it off.

So what's the difference here? Well, in contrast to the wind's blustery attempt to force the coat off the man, the sun respected the man's personal integrity and patiently allow him to make the decision if and when the coat should come off. It was subtle! It was behavioral! It was effective!

Jesus calls us to be the light...to let our light shine BEFORE others and not AT them. Jesus calls us to be the light WITHOUT being showy. And Jesus calls us to be the light that shine before others *"so that they may see our good works and give glory to God who is in heaven."*

In Matthew 25, Jesus refers to humanity as divided into two groups: Those who served Him and those who did not. *"For I was hungry and you fed me...or refused to feed me. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink...or failed to give me a drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me...or refused to welcome me; naked and you clothed me...or failed to clothe me; sick and you visited me...or didn't visit me; in prison and you came to me...or didn't come to me."*

But here's the interesting thing about Jesus parable. Even after Jesus announces blessings or curses based upon how people treated him there is stunned AMAZEMENT to what Jesus is saying. Even the righteous...the ones who fed Jesus and gave him a drink and welcomed him and clothed him and visited him and took care of him...say to him, *"WHEN, Lord? WHEN? Which is precisely when Jesus replies, "Even as you did it unto one of the least of my brothers and sisters, you did it unto me."* They didn't even know they were doing it.

THESE are the ones whose focus is not on some other motive...like winning stars in their crowns of righteousness...or getting people to like them or sing their praises. They are simply doing what comes naturally – letting their light shine brightly...moved with compassion when they see someone in need...reaching out to make a difference where they can...and in so doing, showing the way to the Lord!

In a frequently dark and scary world...where the darkness is always threatening to overcome the light...anxious and frightened people eagerly look for a light. However dim our light might sometimes seem, WE are the ones who are able to give them hope and comfort and peace.

*For people who have lost loved ones.

*For people who are struggling to make ends meet.

*For people who feel they are at the end of their rope.

*For people who are questioning the meaning of their lives.

*For people who are lonely and on the verge of losing hope.

*For people who want to know that life is still good and worth living.

"YOU are the light of the world," Jesus said. *"A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket but on a stand and it give light to everyone in the house. So let your light shine before all people that they may see YOUR light and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."*

So where IS your light shining these days?

Where are YOU being the light of the world?

Where is it that YOUR light is shining such that people see YOU and give glory to our Father who is in heaven?

Does anyone SEE your light?

Does anyone KNOW you are a child of God...a follower of Jesus Christ?

Can they tell that by the way you live your life...by the way you shine your light into the darkness of our sometimes dark and dreary world?

Just where IS your light shining?

A professor was closing his class for the day. *“Are there any further questions?”* he asked.

One student spoke up. *“Yes, I have a question! What is the meaning of life?”*

Everyone laughed and gathered their books. The professor sat and thought for a minute. *“Are you serious?”* he asked.

When the student nodded, the professor took a small piece of glass out of his pocket. It was a piece of a mirror that had been shaped by scraping its edges into a smooth circle. The professor just looked at it for a moment or two, letting the light from the mirror play across the ceiling and on the faces of the students. Then he spoke.

“I found this when I was a kid and scraped it against a rock until I shaped it. I was fascinated with it because I could hold it and reflect light into the darkest corner of a room with it. One day I realized that my life was like this mirror. I decided to spend my life just reflecting the light into as many dark places as I could.”

“Don’t hide your light under a basket,” Jesus said. *“Instead, put it on a stand and let it shine for all to see so that people may see the good things you do and give glory to God who is in heaven.”*

So once again, I ask you, **WHERE IS YOUR LIGHT SHINING?**

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