

February 6, 2011

“Shine”

Matthew 5:14-16 (NLT)

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.

A very rich Texan invites a number of people to his ranch for a BBQ. It is an incredible ranch with acres and acres of beautiful land. It has barns and horses and a beautiful mansion. In the back of the mansion is a pool and as guests arrive and are ushered to the back where the pool is they notice that there is a shark in the pool, swimming back and forth.

At some point the he rich Texan grabs a microphone and says, “I want to welcome you all here today. You probably have noticed that there is a shark in my pool. Anyone who is brave enough to jump in the pool and is able to safely swim the length of the pool I will give that person a choice between either a million dollars, a position in my corporation, or my daughters hand in marriage.”

He no sooner makes this proposition when there is a loud splash in the pool. The guy in the pool is swimming with all his might, and the shark is right on his tail. He gets to the end of the pool and gets out just in time with the shark, mouth wide open, ready to chomp down on him.

The Texan says, “Wow, that was incredible. Well, I’m a man of my word; I offered you a million dollars, a position in my corporation, or my daughters hand in marriage.” What do you want?

And the guy says, “I want the name of the person who push me!”

There are all kinds of theories about how to motivate people.

Anyone remember pitcher Don Sutton? He pitched in the majors for 21 years through the late 60’s to the early 80’s. He was elected to the Hall of Fame as a Dodger and they retired his number (20) in 1998. One time, as a Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher, Sutton hadn’t won a game in eight weeks. The people of the press were very critical about this, even suggesting that he be dropped from the starting rotation. The future looked bleak, and Sutton felt terrible. Then, before a game, Dodgers manager Walter Alston tapped him on the shoulder. "I'd like to speak with you, Don," he said. Sutton prepared himself for the worst.

"Don," said Alston, "I know how the past couple of months have been for you.

Everyone's wondering whether we can make it to the play-offs . . . You know there's a lot of pressure . . . I've had to make a decision." Sutton had visions of being taken off the mound. Then Alston continued. "If the Dodgers are going to win this year," he said, looking Sutton in the eye, "they're going to win with Don Sutton pitching. Come what may, you're staying in the starting job. That's all I wanted to say."

Sutton's losing streak lasted two more weeks, but because of his manager's encouragement he felt different about it. Something in him was turning around. He found himself pitching the best ball of his career. In the National League pennant drive, he won 13 games out of 14.

There are all kinds of theories about how to motivate people. We can do it through guilt, through fear, through shame. But these were not Jesus' methods. Jesus motivated through positive messages of hope and encouragement.

Consider our text for today. Jesus says to His followers, "You are the light of the world." Can you imagine that? Here was a motley crew of farmers and fishermen and tax collectors and housewives in a tiny and remote village in an obscure part of the world and Jesus says to them, "You are the light of the world." Talk about a statement of faith! Let's go farther than that. Talk about a crazy idea! Light of the world? That bunch? It must have sounded absurd at the time even to them. Only Jesus could have seen that through this motley crew God would indeed change the world forever. At the time, however, it probably sounded like idle chatter. "You are the light of the world," he said and so they were. Now do you want to hear something really absurd? So are we.

Jesus says to us this morning that WE are the light of the world. Think about that for a moment. Sink your teeth into it savor it. You and I are the light of the world. What does it mean? Well, let me suggest some possibilities. If we are the light of the world it means:

1. We Have a Responsibility for the World.

"One night at the end of a special Saturday night worship service," writes Warren Hudson of Ontario, Canada, "a thunderstorm unleashed a bolt of lightning that plunged the church into darkness." With the congregation seated in total darkness, the pastor felt his way to the kitchen to find some candles. The pastor handed out the candles to everyone present. Persons lit their candles in much the same way as many churches do on Christmas Eve, each person lighting the candle of the person next to them. The worshipers then made their way through the church's winding hallways to the front door.

"Peering out, we could see the rain coming down in sheets," Warren remembers. With traffic snarled, people were running for the nearest shelter. Looking around they realized that the entire city was in darkness. "There in the darkness we stood," Warren writes, "a little band of Christians, each clutching a light, not sure whether to venture out into the storm or stay inside the church in hopes that the storm would soon blow over."

There in the darkness the light of truth struck him. In this most dramatic way he realized what it means to be the "light of the world." He writes, "It occurred to me then that this is

the temptation I face every day. It is easy to play it safe and be a good Christian in church. It is a lot harder to venture out in faith into the storms of the world." – (Warren Hudson, adapted by King Duncan)

The world is in darkness. There is chaos, immorality, corruption, madness...and God has given us (you and me) the responsibility of bringing light to the world. What is "light?" Jn 8:12 (NLT)

Jesus spoke to the people once more and said, "I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life."

(Verse 16 or our text says) "let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father."

Light is living our lives in such a way that we show what Christ is like. We must show by our deeds and tell others with our words the Good News about Jesus. This is our purpose, as followers of Christ this is our responsibility to the world. If God were not God I think we would frustrate Him and make Him weary. We want Him to show others how wonderful we are. He didn't call us and make us Christians to show what wonderful people we are, but to reveal Jesus through us.

One of my favorite Peanuts cartoons showed Peppermint Patty talking to Charlie Brown. She said, "Guess what, Chuck. The first day of school and I got sent to the principal's office. It was your fault, Chuck." He said, "My fault? How could it be my fault? Why do you say everything is my fault?" She said, "You're my friend, aren't you, Chuck? You should have been a better influence on me."

We have a responsibility to be a better influence on the world as Jesus shines through us. Second, if we are the light of the world it means:

2. We Have Something the World Desperately Needs.

There was a mother mouse who decided to teach her children about the world. So she gathered all of her little mice and set out for a walk. They walked down the hall and turned to the right. Then they went down the hall and took another right. And suddenly they found themselves in front of the family cat dozing in the sunlight. The mother mouse was scared. But she didn't want to give in to her fright. So she signaled to the children to be very quiet and to follow as she began to tip toe quietly and slowly past the sleeping cat. Just as she was about to get past the cat, the cat's eyes popped open and raised its paw.

The little mice were petrified. What would their mother do? Well, just as the cat's paw started to come down, that mother mouse looked the cat right in the eye and started barking like a dog. And do you know what? The cat was so startled and frightened that it jumped up and ran away! The mother mouse, wiped her brow, shook a little and then turned to her little mice and said, "Children, I hope you learned a valuable lesson. Sometimes it's good to know a second language!"

It's the same way with us. It's good to know a second language. Salt and light are the language of God; the language of Grace; the language of hope and love. And when this language is translated into action it becomes the most beautiful language ever spoken. We're called to be salt and light and to speak the language of God as we live our faith. We're called to live the Word. – (Billy D. Strayhorn, *The Salt and Light Brigade*)

We have what the world desperately needs the love and hope that are found in Christ.

3. We Are Not the Source of Our Light, but We Reflect a Much Greater Light.

In an article entitled "Reflect the Light," Roble Nebres tells about the time he drove to the summit of Mt. Haleakala. After watching the sunset it became dark and he became anxious about the descent down the steep, winding road. When he left the parking lot the median strips on the road suddenly came alive with reflectorized lights. They provided a much needed directional guide on the mountain road.

The reflectors illuminated the way for Nebres, who made his descent safely down the treacherous mountain road. The reflectors, however, were useless without his headlights shining on them. The light they gave depended on the light from another source. Otherwise they could not help him see.

When Jesus told his disciples they were the "light of the world," he meant they were to be reflectors of the light of God. God is the illuminating source. God provides the light that is reflected from us. And God needs us to be reflectors of God's light to a world of darkness. As we stay connected to Jesus, His light will shine through us. Like the little girl who on the way home from church turned to her mother and said, "Mommy, the preacher's sermon this morning confused me."

The mother said, "Oh... what part?"

The girl replied, "Well, he said that God is bigger than we are. Is that true?"

"Yes, that's true," the mother replied.

"He also said that God lives within us. Is that true, too?"

Again the mother replied, "Yes."

"Well," said the girl. "if God is bigger than us and He lives in us, wouldn't He show through?"

Yes, if God is in us, He'd show through.

John Stott, from Great Britain and a leading Reformed theologian, has these challenging words to say to the church today:

You know what your own country is like. I'm a visitor, and I wouldn't presume to speak

about America. But I know what Great Britain is like. I know something about the growing dishonesty, corruption, immorality, violence, pornography, the diminishing respect for human life, and the increase in abortion.

Whose fault is it? Let me put it like this: if the house is dark at night, there is no sense in blaming the house. That's what happens when the sun goes down. The question to ask is, "Where is the light?"

If meat goes bad, there is no sense in blaming the meat. That is what happens when the bacteria are allowed to breed unchecked. The question to ask is, "Where is the salt?"

If society becomes corrupt like a dark night or stinking fish, there's no sense in blaming society. That's what happens when fallen human society is left to itself and human evil is unrestrained and unchecked. The question to ask is "Where is the church?"

- John Stott, adapted by Adrian Dieleman, *The Salt of the Earth*

Our church has been in Patchogue for over 100 years. Kept by God; He has protected the church, and made it fruitful. The church was here before we came will be here long after we are gone ... but, this is our time, this is our moment. Reflect the light of Christ. Is He in you? Then He will shine through you, bringing light to a world that desperately needs light, and He has given us, me and you, the responsibility of bring His light to the world. Let's get out there and shine.