

Wesley United Methodist Church

February 9, 2014

You Are the Light of the World.

Matthew 5:13-16

Joe and Moe were carpenters. Joe was always finding ways to tease Moe, who was not too bright. One night Joe shined his flashlight up to the 2nd story of a house and said, "Moe, would you mind climbing up this light beam and get my hammer for me?" Moe said, "Ha! How dumb do you think I am?" "I'm sorry," Joe replied. "You'd better be," said Moe. "I know you too well...you'd let me get half way up and then turn the light off!"

Well, Moe wasn't too bright. But there is a story that has been told of one of the brightest men who ever lived. Albert Einstein. Einstein showed up at the institute where he worked one morning hobbling around with a cane. It seems that during the night he had stubbed his big toe. "This happened to me at least five or six times before from walking around in the darkness," he explained to a colleague. His colleague asked if it wouldn't save the trouble to simply turn on a light. "Oh," said Einstein, "I never thought of that."

Isn't it better to light a candle than to stumble in the dark? Our task as followers of Jesus is to provide light for a world that lives in darkness.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said to his disciples, "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 your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

Light was the first thing God created. Some of the first words recorded in the Bible are these: "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Genesis 1:3). Scientists tell us that all matter and energy come from light and our life depends on it. People in Bible times knew far more about darkness than we. Light was a luxury. There were no street lamps. On a dark night if you were traveling, the world was a scary place. Roads were treacherous and criminals worked their trade in the dark. You were thankful that cities were often built on hills. "A city set on a hill cannot be hidden," noted Jesus. Many of the villages in Judea were built on the summits or sides of mountains, and could be seen from afar. From a great distance, one knew the location of the next village because of the light from that hilltop. Darkness was not only a problem on the road. At the end of your journey, light was still a luxury. Palestinian homes were generally dark. They usually had small windows. They had no electricity, no light bulbs like we have. Their light consisted of a lamp which was a bowl filled with oil that had a wick.

When they needed light the lamp was placed on a lamp stand. The most difficult part of having this light in the house was in lighting the lamp. Remember they didn't have matches or lighters. As a result, no one wanted their light go out because it took work to get to light the wick again. However, when people went out of the house it was dangerous to leave the light on. So, for safety reasons, when they left their homes the lamp would be taken from its lamp stand and placed under an earthen vessel where it could burn risk free.

Of course, no one lights a light only to put it under a basket or earthen vessel. That would defeat its purpose. So, as soon as someone returned to the house, they would return the light to its stand so it could shine and light the house.

It was only natural that light became associated with religious faith. The Psalmist wrote, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psalm 27:1) Isaiah the prophet had foretold the coming of the one who would be the light of the world. "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned" (9:2). In the New Testament the light is significant. John in his gospel built on Isaiah's vision. "In the beginning was the Word," he wrote, "and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to

become children of God..." (John 1:1-12). Later in John's Gospel Jesus speaks to the people of his time and affirms John's description. "I am the light of the world, he who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8:12). Christ is the light of the world.

When we think of light we right away think of the sun. We've been taught that the sun is the center of the solar system and so it is the light of the world. But the sun, in spite of its greatness, is not the "Light of the World." The 'Light of the World' is the Son of God.

This church does not exist to exalt a great teacher or preacher or an outstanding healer. We exist to glorify the Son of God the light that has come into the world and overcome the darkness of sin and death. It is only as the Light of Christ shines into our lives that our lives have meaning and purpose.

"You are the light of the world," Christ said. What an awesome compliment and what an awesome responsibility. These words were not spoken lightly, no pun intended. Just as Christ came to bring light to a world stumbling in the dark, so are we to bring his light to the world in which we live. Just as his life was not focused on only his own needs, but the needs of others, so he calls us to be men and women for others.

A story about a lady named Sara who spent six weeks one summer along the United States-Mexico border working with an organization called "No More Deaths." This organization provides humanitarian aid to migrants crossing the desert into the U.S. Over 2000 people have died over the past decade trying to cross into the United States, most from dehydration or exhaustion caused by the oppressive heat and meager supplies. No matter how you feel about this flow of illegal immigration, it is not right by Christian standards that those people, often women and children, have died like this.

Sara spent the summer handing out bottles of water and granola bars, binding feet and seeking medical attention for those who had the greatest need. In seeking to let her light shine for Christ, she discovered something unexpected. She discovered a new closeness to God. Her Christian faith grew as she worked with men, women, and children who have been forced to leave everything behind in search of life for their families. She says, "I do not think it is because I am praying more or reading the Bible any more carefully there is just something about being here and doing this that makes it all seem so real to me." That often happens when people give their life in Christian service. They discover that the light within them grows in direct proportion to the light they serve and provide for others.

A man tells of having trouble with his car late one evening. He made it to a small garage. Something about the engine needed attention. A mechanic exclaimed the trouble while a helper stood by, directing the beams of a powerful flashlight onto the engine. However, something else attracted the helper's attention. He turned away and in doing so inadvertently turned off the light. The mechanic looked up, and with good-humored impatience exclaimed: "Shine your light! What are you here for anyway?"

There is something to think about this question. What are we here for? Just come to church once a week to satisfy the demands of our God? That's not what following Christ is all about. We are those who are called to shine the light of his love to a world of darkness. Are you doing your part? Do you have the light of Christ shining within your soul? Someone once said, "You can't give away what you don't have any more that you can't come back from where you haven't been." Is the light of Christ shining in your life? Are you shining your light in the world through acts of love in Christ's name?

"You are the light of the world." What an awesome responsibility and at the same time, what a privilege. Are you doing your part?