

“Sharing God’s Light”

Matthew 5:1-16, Genesis 1:1-3, John 1:1-5, 1 Peter 2:9

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Our scripture is from the gospel of Matthew the New Living Translation with The Message translation after each beatitude. **Matthew 5:1-16 NLT & MSG** “One day as Jesus saw the crowds gathering, he went up on the mountainside and sat down. Jesus’ disciples gathered around him, and he began to teach them. “God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. “You’re blessed when you’re at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and God’s rule. God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted. “You’re blessed when you feel you’ve lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you. God blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit the whole earth. “You’re blessed when you’re content with just who you are—no more, no less. That’s the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can’t be bought. God blesses those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied. “You’re blessed when you’ve worked up a good appetite for God. God’s food and drink in the best meal you’ll ever eat. God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy. “You’re blessed when you care. At the moment of being ‘care-full,’ you find yourselves cared for. God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God. “You’re blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world. God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God. “You’re blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That’s when you discover who you really are, and your place in God’s family. God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. “You’re blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God’s kingdom. “God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way. “You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. “You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. 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. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.”

Most people are fascinated with light. Our homes, cities, and streets are lit up with a multitude of lights in all shapes, sizes, and colors. Kids love to play with flashlights and glow sticks. Candlelight is often used to set a soothing, relaxing, and sometimes a romantic mood. Entertainers bask in the spotlight and dazzle us with light shows. Signs keep us safe by reflecting light. Most are captivated by star light. Colored light grabs our attention to a multitude of signs and signals. Some people spend hours everyday mesmerized by the tiny lights of a television. Others earn their wages by concentrating on the light of a computer.

Scripture speaks of light as the symbol of God’s presence. Genesis tells us that **Genesis 1:1-3 NRSV** “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.” Without God there was total darkness and chaos. The first thing God created was light.

John explains it this way, **John 1:1-5 NRSV** “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Jesus was in the beginning with God. All things came into

being through Jesus, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in Jesus was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

God created light and life. Jesus is our light and the darkness will never overcome, extinguish, or smother the light. This is a wonderful, profound, and extraordinary truth. Do you have days when it seems the darkness is growing and creeping in on you? I know I do. Times of darkness when the world seems to be chaotic, random, and unjust. Times of darkness filled with gloomy, cold rain when every task seems to be an uphill battle. Times of darkness when someone we love is sick, disabled, or left us behind as they went on ahead to life eternal. Times of darkness when anger, frustration, or silence enters our relationships. Times of darkness when we struggle at school, work, or with money. Times of darkness when we battle an addiction or procrastination. Times of darkness and you fill in the blank.

From the very beginning of time, God triumphed over darkness and created light, order, and rhythm. Everyday darkness will be overcome by light. When our ancestors felt that darkness was closing in on them, Jesus, the light of the world, came to earth to remind them and us that the light shines in the darkness and the darkness will never overcome the light. No matter how dark it may seem God will provide light and life. Darkness and death is fleeting. Light and life is eternal.

Scripture is one way we can illumine our life with light. The psalmist sang, “God’s word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” God’s word often sparks a thought showing us the way. In Joseph Schmidt’s book, *Praying our Experiences*, he writes, “Some scripture arouses in us such an emotional reaction that they cry out to be heard. These passages have such power because they touch a part of us that reverberates with their message. These passages stir and capture us because they have connected with a part of ourselves created by an experience now struggling to be unfolded. Scripture is powerful because scripture lights up and refocus our experiences”

One example of Scripture lighting our way, is the account of two disciples on the road to Emmaus. After that dark, terrible, and disheartening Friday crucifixion of Jesus, they were downcast. Covered, surrounded, and suppressed with darkness. A stranger consoled them with scripture. They talked about familiar scriptures and still were unaware that God’s word was scattering the darkness. Then scripture connected with their experience and that spark set their minds ablaze. Suddenly, they understood that Jesus was alive just as scripture had proclaimed, and it reframed their dark Friday experience. Their sorrow turned to joy as they ran to tell others. They reflected back saying our hearts felt strangely warm as the scriptures were revealed to us, until it blazed illumining our understanding, and dispersing the darkness. We call scripture God’s living word, because one can read scripture a hundred times and it may be confusing and seem irrelevant; but, then we find ourselves in a new experience and now that scripture speaks clearly. We are now ready to be led into the depths of an experience and the scripture will serve as our guide. Scripture has power to illuminate, clarify, and evaluate our experiences. Like a true friend scripture can reach into our heart to arouse and to console by bringing out into the light memories and feelings that we might have scarcely know were there. Scripture then reveals the God sighting, the presence of the Lord in our life. Scripture illumines the connection with God so we can sense Jesus who lives and walks with us.

Joseph Schmidt writes, “The Scriptures serve us best not when they become a filter through which we prejudge our experiences but when they become our light...As our light, the scriptures help us clarify and explore our experiences...to discover aspects of our experiences that previously have been inaccessible to our gaze.” Scripture helps us explore and treasure our own experiences revealing the good news that God is lovingly present in our daily living.”

Darkness can easily deceive the truth. One day a young soldier and his commanding officer boarded a train together. The only available seats were across from an attractive young lady who was traveling with her grandmother. As the four engaged in conversation, the soldier and the young lady kept eyeing one another. There was an obvious mutual attraction. Suddenly the train went into a tunnel,

sending the train car into complete darkness. Immediately two distinct sounds were heard: the smooch of a kiss followed by the whack of a slap across someone's face. The grandmother thought, I can't believe he kissed my granddaughter, but I'm glad she gave him the slap he deserved. The commanding officer thought, I don't blame the boy for kissing the lady, but it's a shame that she missed him and hit me instead. The young lady thought, I'm glad he kissed me, but I wish my grandmother hadn't slapped him for doing it. And as the train broke into the sunlight, a huge smile broke on the soldier's face. He had managed to kiss a pretty lady and slap his commanding officer and get away with both!

Scripture can illumine even the darkest experience and over time reveal the truth. Darkness often misleads our perceptions giving us a twisted, unclear, and distorted view of life. Scripture will not reveal all the answers, but Scripture does reveal the light of our loving God. It is a joy an honor to give our first graders a bible today, so they are illumined with God's love and our love for them.

Light symbolizes, truth, goodness, and God's redemptive work. Jesus is the way, the truth and the light, Jesus is a personification of light. Jesus is our divine illumination. When Jesus was crucified, he took on the sins of the world and darkness covered the land even though it was midday. The darkness and weight of sin could not overcome the light of Jesus as he rose from the grave, redeeming us and shining light into every believer's life. Peter calls us children of light for we **1 Peter 2:9 NRSV "are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that we may proclaim the mighty acts of Jesus who called us out of darkness into God's marvelous light."**

God ignites our light, so each and every one of us can shine. Jesus is the true light who enlightens everyone and the Holy Spirit sustain us keeping our light shining. There is a wonderful tradition at workcamp called care cards. When a person sees light in another person they write it down, describe the light on a card, and give it to that person. Marriage experts have found that daily compliments are one of the keys to an intimate, growing marriage. It is sad that too often we look past an abundance of light in a person and identify and share some kind of darkness, a void, fault or weakness when we could have helped them shine even brighter with a compliment. Together we shine brighter when we affirm and share how we see the light of Christ shining through one another.

Jesus was affirming the light in the people around him in our scripture this morning as he told the people around him and us today how we are blessed. Everyone has at least one of the light shining characteristics. Are you blessed and have the light of God shining through you, because you depend on God, mourn, are humble, pursue righteousness, are gracious, are pure in heart, are a peacemaker, or proclaim the Good news regardless of the consequences?

A person might not know or forget that God is light, a light so powerful that darkness will never overcome God. A person might not meditate on the illuminating power of scripture to light their path. Yet all of us come into contact with other people. Jesus is urging us to be light for one another. Jesus said you are the light of the world. God wants us to come together to worship, build each other up, discuss scripture and disciple one another to intensify the light. Clustered together, illumining one another we are like a well-lit city on the mountain shining in the night for all to see.

In this silence think of someone who is a light to you. Call them to say thank you or send them a card of gratitude. In this silence ponder how you are light and how you hope to continue to shine.

As disciples, as light bearers, we are striving to imitate Christ while at the same time modeling Christ to one another. The role of a disciple is to illumine the pathway for another just as we follow the path illumined by someone else. As a church we gather together to intensify our light, give thanks, and praise God the source of light and then go out into the world letting our light shine. Amen