

**You are Light** - February 5, 2023

*Matthew 5:13-20*

I expect more than a few of us have had a hard week. So much is going on. Too much is going on. Some of us are worried about our jobs. Some are debating speaking the truth in public when we know we could be personally or professionally hurt for doing so. Others are worried about health issues: either our own or those of close friends or family.

In short, many of us are just hanging on and don't need one more thing to bother us or be added to the long list of things we are supposed to be doing. Let me tell you something: you're not alone. Exhaustion is the rule of the day. Most of us are living life on the edge, thinking that if just one more burden comes our way, we will just collapse. Do you ever just want to scream at God, "When can I get a break? When is it going to stop? When does it get any better?"

First, if you are one of the many of us living on the edge, I want you to know that it is quite normal to feel upset, frustrated, and overwhelmed from time to time. You are certainly not alone. I think our congregation probably has more than its share of people who are just getting by — or wondering if they can get by. Second, I truly hope that from time to time you are able to find a place where you can let loose and shake your fist at God and let your anger out. It's OK. God is bigger than you and me and this church and this city and this state and this nation and this world. If anyone knows what we are enduring, it is our God. Yes, many of us are in the habit of pretending everything is all right. We pretend to co-workers, we pretend to our partners, we pretend to our family, we even pretend to ourselves. But the one person we cannot pretend to, never, ever, pretend to, is God.

Each week when we gather to share our Joys and Concerns, we remember that God knows us and God knows what we need even better than we know ourselves. We can't pretend before God, because God does know and that is wonderful news. You know, it's OK that we get mad and shake our fist at God because God knows our pain and frustration. God knows we want and God knows that we need something to change about our lives. God knows we're sick and tired of living on the edge and somehow, some way it's got to stop. Shake your fist! Get mad! Let it out! God is able to handle it!

Our lives and our situations are not terribly different from those of the people Jesus was preaching to 2000 years ago. Just like us, the people hearing Jesus suffered from all kinds of problems. They contended with sickness, instability, and difficult relationships. They wondered how they would get by to the next day. They sometimes didn't know what they would eat or where they would sleep. And yet, to those people back then and even to us today Jesus makes this startling statement: "You are the light of the world."

You. We. Us. The folks in this room and even the ones who passing by outside these doors. Together, we are light.

Now this raises two questions. What does Jesus mean when he calls us, light? More importantly, perhaps, is how can we possibly qualify as being light. What's so bright and shiny about us?

Let's start with Jesus calling us the light of the world. Now light is just another way of saying we are to be using our time on earth to do good. That means being good with others and it means being good for ourselves. The prophet Isaiah reminded people that God is honored and we are God's light-bearers when we make a difference in people's lives for the better. We are not being God's light when we try and show off. We are not being God's light when we expect others to tell us how wonderful we are. We are not being God's light when we are doing what we're supposed to do in the first place. No, God's light doesn't work that way.

God's light shines in the most remote and unexpected places. God's light shines in the darkest corners of human existence. God's light is what happens when you feed the hungry, talk to a stranger, welcome someone into your house. God's light is what happens when you have the courage to do or say something that will change another's life for good. God's light is being a living, breathing, example of love in a world that is rooted in hate.

"Ah, preacher," you may say, "that's nice, but I'm living on the edge. I don't have even a matchstick for myself, let alone somebody else. You talk about light, but frankly, I'm just burned-out."

And you know something, you're right! I sometimes feel burned out myself. You feel burned out. We feel tired and exhausted and there is no way that we can produce any light at all to shine anywhere.

And you know something, you're right! We can't produce light. When we are empty and exhausted there is no way light can come out of us. We can't help ourselves and we certainly can't make a difference in the world.

But this is where we are mistaken. No, we are not mistaken about being burned out. We are mistaken when we think that we have to be the source of the light! Friends, there is one and only one source of light in the world and that source is Jesus Christ.

We don't have to make light — which is great news because we can't be the light anyway. All we have to do is trust that Jesus is the source of the light and that when we believe in him, the light he brings will shine through us.

Jesus is the light. His words and his actions, everything about him is light. Moreover, his light is meant to care not just for the world but even for you.

When you trust that Jesus is the light of the world, the light will first and foremost penetrate and enlighten you! The light and love of Jesus will reach out and reach down into all your hidden places. It will invade those dark corners of your mind where your fears are hiding. The light of Jesus will grab those guilty, self-defeating feelings and throw them into the rubbish where they belong. The light of Jesus will show you the places where your words and deeds can make a difference. More importantly, the light of Jesus will show you the places where you cannot make a difference—so God can take over and you, thankfully, can let go.

It's a wonderful thing, this light of Christ. When we let it in to our lives, suddenly we can see with a new spiritual sight that makes everything clear. You know, we spend so much time beating ourselves up. We spend so much time blaming ourselves for the people and situations we cannot control. We worry about the worst possibilities and kill ourselves imagining all kinds of terrible things.

But the light shows us that we don't have to beat ourselves up. The light reveals that the only things in life we might want to blame ourselves for are things we did to ourselves. The light will stop us from killing ourselves because we will understand that our imaginations work overtime to make our life situations seem far worse than they really are.

All we need to do is say, "Yes" to the light and instead of having to make light ourselves, the light of Christ will shine through us.

But still you are saying, "How can I be a light-bearer for Christ. How can the light of Christ possibly shine through me? I know who I am I know what I am and I know I am not worthy."

To that, friends, I say, "Hooray!"

Personally, I fear the people who believe they are perfect much more than the ones who think they are unworthy. The self-proclaimed perfect people of the world believe that they don't need the light and so they will never open themselves to it. They may sometimes act like they are saying and doing good things, but in reality they are only shining for themselves and sooner rather than later, their light will go out.

No, friends, you are the light of the world, just as you are! We are the light of the world, just as we are. Maybe today you got out of bed and shouted at God. I say, wonderful! The very act of being frustrated and telling God that you're angry is a profound act of faith. After all, if you don't believe God exists, why would you be yelling at God in the first place? Wouldn't that be foolish?

But Jesus Christ takes those of us who have only the merest hint of faith, the tiniest drop of hope, the slightest breath of love and takes those bits and pieces to fashion us into his very own lamp though which his light will shine on the world.

All of us already have the most important tool we need for the light of Christ to shine through us: We, you, are loved by Jesus. Jesus loves you, right now, just as you are, without preconditions. Jesus knows you, knows where you've been, knows what you've done, and still says, "I love you."

The only thing we need to do, the only thing we have to confess, the only thing we have to believe is that it is true. When you can say to yourself, "I believe that Jesus loves me, right at this very minute." Then, watch out world, the light that will pour out of you will be blinding!

The light is a gift. A free gift from God given to us only by grace. We did nothing to make God give it to us. We can't earn it no matter how hard we try. We can't buy it. But, we can accept it. We can accept the gift of being channels for Christ's light, celebrating his gift with each day of our existence, and sharing it wherever we go.

Oh, the change! Oh the transformation! Oh, the relief!

Friends, when you allow the light into your life, I don't promise all your problems will be solved. I don't promise your relationships will instantly get better. I don't promise you will instantly experience overwhelming peace.

But I do know that with the light shining through your life, things will change. Answers will come. Stress will be released. Confusion will decrease. The light that brought the world into being, the light which was the first Word God spoke, the light which is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will show you the way and hold your hand so that you don't have to stumble or fall anymore.

I say these words in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.