

“Shining Lights”

The Rev. S. Shane Nanney – February 5, 2023

Matthew 5:13-20

There is a story about a cathedral blazed with light day and night. It gleamed in the light. Its beauty was overwhelming. The joy and brilliance of the music enchanted all who visited. Yet, few people worshipped there.

A violent war destroyed much of the country, including the beautiful cathedral. As the nation rebuilt, its wise ruler guided the rebuilding of the cathedral. Unknown to the people, the ruler did not restore the lighting system.

At the ruler’s command, the worship service to rededicate the cathedral was set for midnight on a warm spring night when there would be no moonlight. The ruler ordered each person to bring a small lantern of certain size and shape, lighted, to the worship service.

On the night of the dedication, a strange and wonderful thing happened. At first only a few lights dotted the street outside the cathedral. As worshippers entered, they cast small spots of light in the midnight darkness. But as the crowd gathered, the light enlarged.

As each small lantern was set in the space provided for it by each seat, the cathedral gradually began to glow again. When it was filled with worshippers, the radiance of the thousands of lanterns was so powerful that the sanctuary glowed as it had long before.

Beginning with the announcements, the ruler said to the people, “See how the light of your lanterns has restored the beauty and light of this cathedral? Just so, the light of your faith shines before others in the world. Without your light, this place would be darkness. Never again will there be any light in this cathedral except the light you bring into it with your presence at worship. That will remind you day by day how important the light of your faith is to God’s world.”

The ruler, like Jesus himself, was calling faithful followers to let their light shine before others so that everyone could see their good works and glorify God. Each

of us as a worshipper comes to this place each week to renew our spirits, to worship the God who has called us to be the light of God in the world, and to find the love in order to carry that light into the world.

But sometimes our light falters. We misunderstand or make mistakes. We forget or do not realize how large God's love is. We fail to love. We become depressed or discouraged. Our lights flicker. There is danger they will disappear.

When that happens, Jesus returns to us to renew our strength to love and to help us to forgive our own failures. So how do we respond?

Sometimes we want to give up and walk away. It is disappointing, even depressing to discover just how human we are. Or we may have learned to find security in the wrong places. Or we may not want to learn to do what Jesus calls us to do.

We are, after all, free people. We do not have to learn to forgive each other, or to be patient. We do not have to change when we are wrong, when what we are doing is hurting others.

But each time in the bread and the juice, Jesus Christ returns to us to invite us to forgive each other. To be forgiven. To be patient with each other. To teach each other and enlarge each other's vision of God's love. To have the courage to see where we are wrong and to change.

It may well be said that the greatest **compliment** that can be paid to another Christian is to tell him or her that he or she is the light of the world. Jesus commanded all Christians to be what he himself claimed to be. *"AS LONG AS I AM IN THE WORLD, I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD."* When Jesus commanded his followers to be the lights of the world, he demanded nothing less than that they should be like himself.

A light is to be seen. So, then, as Christians, we too are meant to be seen. As someone has once said, "There can be no such thing as a secret discipleship, for either the secrecy destroys the discipleship, or the discipleship destroys the secrecy." A person's Christianity should be perfectly visible to all. Further, this Christianity should not be visible only within the church. A Christian, whose light stops at the church door, is not much use to anyone. It should be even more

visible in the ordinary activities of the world. Our Christianity should be visible in the way we treat the shop assistant across the counter, in the way we order a meal in a restaurant, in the way we treat the lowest employee or serve our employer, in the way we play a game, drive our cars, and in the daily language we use. A Christian should be just as much a Christian in the factory, in the workshop, in the schoolroom, in the kitchen and on the golf course as he or she is in the church. Jesus did not say, “You are the light of the church.” He said, “*YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.*” And in our everyday dealings, it should be evident to all. They will know we are Christians by our love!

The light of the love of God has led us to faith and continues to shine where Christ meets the faithful worshipper. That light is also given to us as faith that shines throughout our lives wherever we go. The light gives us power to forgive ourselves and others, and the power and courage to change. Jesus Christ has called us together in our baptisms to be a people who love and renew and strengthen each other. He also called us together to reach out to everyone whose lives we can touch to invite them to receive the light of faith. All are invited to share your strength and shelter and love and power to renew the hope of others.

Let us pray that God will draw us close around Jesus Christ who is the light of the world. That we will learn together what it means to be light and salt. As we draw closer to Jesus Christ, we will discover how much closer we have become to each other.

Let us feel the love of God, shining among us, in forgiveness and in healing power. Let us receive our Lord in the bread and the juice and carry the light of God’s love and healing power with us wherever we go this week. We are called to light up the whole world by carrying our tiny lanterns of individual trust and faithfulness wherever we go.

Jesus was lifted up on the cross to draw all people to himself. So that all people, will become a living cathedral, living lights that shine in the darkness, and that the darkness will not be able to overcome it. Let us pray that we may become such lights today. Amen.