

Epiphany 5A, 2011

Text: Matthew 5:13-20

Title: The Light of the World

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Two weeks ago, Jesus called disciples, “Come follow me, and I’ll make you fishers of men.” Jesus doesn’t need disciples, but he wants them. He wants folks like you to share in the joy!

Last week Jesus told you what your new life would look like as his disciples- poor, hungry, meek, and persecuted. It doesn’t sound that appealing. But that’s not all. You will be filled with his mercy, his righteousness, his holiness, and the kingdom of heaven will be yours.

This week Jesus says to you, “You are light of the world.”

Consider that for a moment. You are the light of the world.

It sounds like a mistake. It sounds backwards. Jesus is the light of the world, right? He is the one sent to bring light to this dark world.

We’re celebrating epiphany- the shining of Jesus’ light into the world. Two weeks ago we heard, “the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.” That light is Jesus.

Jesus is your light. Apart from Him there is only darkness- cold, dark and death from sin.

Jesus brings you everything that light brings: life, warmth, growth, security, enlightenment, the ability to see yourself and the world around you clearly. He casts out the darkness of sin and brings you into the warm glow of his presence.

But it doesn’t stop there. Jesus doesn’t stop with being the light of the world himself. Jesus is the light of the world, but He’s not the only light.

Jesus makes you a light as well. Jesus uses you to bring light into a dark world. He doesn’t have to. He could do the job himself. But Jesus wants to get you involved. He wants you to share in His joy.

You are the light of the world.

Jesus could have chosen any way He wanted to bring light into the world. He could have chosen any one. And He chose you.

Jesus looked at you and said, “You know, I could use someone like you.” At your baptism, Jesus said, “You’re mine.” And so we lit your candle and sent you off to do some good, to spread some light around.

The light that Jesus brings into your life is not just for you to sit and stare at off in your little corner. Jesus brings light into your life for you to shine all around you.

My wife is always getting after me for leaving lights on around the house. There are a couple of lights in particular that I always seem to leave on. A light that's on in an empty room doesn't do anyone any good. It's a waste.

If you keep the light of Christ for yourself and don't spread it around, it's like leaving a light on in an empty room. It's like hiding a light under a basket. It doesn't do anyone any good.

Jesus has given you his light so that you can shine it where other people are. There are plenty of folks still in the dark. There are plenty of folks who don't know the light. If we just shine the light to each other, and we're already in the light ourselves, what's the point?

So how do you do it? How do you let your light shine? Where do you start?

The first step is to be sure that your light is actually shining, that your life is overflowing with the light of Christ.

As a Christian, you are like one of those solar powered lights, that absorb light during the day and stays lit during the night.

As a Christian you can't generate your own light, but you absorb the light of Jesus and let that shine out from you.

You are filled with light as you are filled with Jesus. Jesus shines His light in through your ears, in through your lips and fills you with Himself.

If you stay away from Jesus for too long, your light becomes dim and begins to fade.

You are here today not just for yourself, not just to receive enlightenment for you. You are here for the sake of those who are still in darkness. You are here to be filled with light, so that when you leave here you are shining, glowing, radiating with Jesus Christ.

So step one is to be filled with light. You do that here in the Divine Service and at home in your daily devotions, as you receive Jesus Christ.

Step two is to let that light shine. Jesus gives you a clue how this works. Our verse for the week is Matthew 5:16, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

Letting your light shine involves doing good works. Not because they'll save you, not because you're looking for a reward, but because that's who you are.

It could be as simple as helping someone shovel their snow, providing a meal to someone who's hungry, or a listening ear to someone who's lonely.

The kind of works you do are unique to you and the gifts God has given you. No two members of this congregation are the same. You are not interchangeable. God uses each one of you in different ways.

So figure out what gifts God has given you, and how you can put them to good use.

In the end, it's not you who's doing these things, but Jesus who is doing them through you.

So step one is to be filled with Jesus' light.

Step two is to let that light shine.

And step three is to give glory to God.

When you do some good, people are going to want to thank you and give you credit. They'll want to put your name on some plaque or certificate or find some other way of recognizing you.

You must stop them. You get none of the credit. It's all God, and the glory goes to Him. They might figure this out on their own, but you might need to actually tell people this from time to time.

Johann Sebastian Bach was a musical genius. His compositions are still some of the most loved even three hundred years later. At the end of each piece of music he wrote, Bach included three small letters: SDG. This stood for "Soli Deo Gloria" which is Latin for "to God alone be the glory." Bach didn't want any praise or glory for himself, but everything he wrote was for the praise of God.

So when people try to thank you, point them to God, and tell them to give glory to Him, because Jesus is the one shining His light through you. He gets all the credit.

You are the light of the world.

Be filled with Jesus' light.

Let that light shine.

Give glory to God.