

## **“Turn On Your Light!”**

### **Matthew 5:13-20**

How can we best witness our Christian faith to those around us? We all feel uncomfortable going up to people we work with, going up to people in the mall or the restaurant, going up to family members, and saying, “Why don’t you come to church on Sunday morning?” “If you’d like, I’ll pick you up.” To use this direct approach once or twice is not so bad. But when the person we ask never shows up in church, it becomes difficult and awkward to keep asking. We think we are being a pest and nuisance. But at least we tried once or twice. We got the person thinking about church. We got the person thinking about us and looking at us. Maybe it is at that point that we no longer need to ask them to come to church. Our witness to them begins to take a different form.

They begin looking at who we are and who the church is we belong to. They begin asking some questions. How is our church unique? How does our church stand apart from the rest of society? Why would I want to become active in this particular church?

When people begin to ask these kinds of questions about us, our witness to them is no longer simply a matter of asking them to attend a church service. Our witness becomes who we are and how we live out the Gospel of Jesus Christ. When we witness, we are setting ourselves up for scrutiny and evaluation. People look at us and either decide we are hypocrites with nothing unique to offer or we are a Christ-centered community set apart for the work of the Gospel.

When people begin to see us reading, studying, and living the scriptures, then we are truly witnessing and people will want to become a part of who we are. But pastor, the Bible is boring. The Bible is so old and outdated. The Bible is so full of contradictions. Even as active Christians, how can we possibly read, study, and live according to a book written 2,000 years ago? How could reading, studying, and living the scriptures draw new people into our fellowship?

These kinds of questions are asked by people who are afraid of what the Bible has to say. Because if we were truly reading and studying scripture, we soon realize how badly we live up to being called a Christian. We soon realize how sinful we really are. We soon realize why it is so difficult to bring others into the Christian faith. To be a Christian is a great and continuous challenge and responsibility. But when we are at least trying, when we are giving it our best shot at meeting the challenges and responsibilities of being a Christian, then we are like a light not only to those around us but to the whole world.

Isaiah, in this morning's Old Testament lesson, has just returned with his people from exile in Babylon. They are finally home after 70 years of exile. Isaiah quickly reminds his people not to slack off. He reminds them of the challenges and responsibilities of being God's people.

Is it not sharing your food with the hungry, taking the homeless poor into your house, clothing the naked when you meet them and never evading a duty to your kinsfolk?

That's pretty scary stuff. No wonder people are afraid to read, study, and live the scriptures. Do you really want to share your hard earned food? Do you really want to take a poor person into your house? That could be a very risky thing to do. Do you want to give your clothes away to the needy? Can we ever have the time and energy to never evade a duty to our kinsfolk?

But if you can just try, just give it your best shot, then Isaiah says your light shall break forth like the dawn and soon you will grow healthy like a wound newly healed; your own righteousness shall be your vanguard and the glory of the Lord your rearguard. Then, if you call, the Lord will answer; if you cry to him, he will say, "Here I am."

People around you will see that. People will see the Lord is present with you and your church and they will want to become a part of it. But it will be scary. It will be scary to read, study, and live the scriptures. It will be scary to move from being dependent on ourselves for life to becoming dependent on God for life. It will be scary to let the glory of the Lord be our rearguard, supporting us and catching us when we begin to fall. It takes a leap of faith to let God save us.

One night a house caught fire and a young boy was forced to flee to the roof. His father stood on the ground below with outstretched arms, calling to his son, "Jump! I'll catch you." He knew the boy had to jump to save his life.

However, all the boy could see between himself and his dad was fire, smoke, and blackness. As can be imagined, the child was filled with panic. His father yelled again, "Jump

son! I will catch you.” But the boy protested, “Daddy, I can’t see you.” The father replied, “But I can see you and that is all that matters.”

Each of us has experienced what that young boy was experiencing on the rooftop of the burning house. Every time we face a crisis in our lives, whether it be our health, finances, death, divorce, or whatever, all we can see is fire, smoke, and blackness. We feel lonely and afraid. We don’t know what waits on the other side. Like the small boy we cannot decide if we should stay where we are or if we should jump through the fire, smoke, and blackness that faces us.

If we are on our own, if we are totally alone, we are going to stay on that rooftop and probably be consumed by the fire. We are going to face our disease or sickness by ourselves even if it kills us. We are going to face our financial problems by ourselves even if those problems consume us and all we have worked for, for so many years.

When a spouse, or parent, or child dies; if we are all alone we are going to stay on the rooftop and face our grief by ourselves. But it’s only a matter of time before the fire and smoke of death closes in on us and consumes us. When we are experiencing marital problems or discipline problems with our children, we can certainly solve those kinds of personal problems on our own. But before we know it, the fire has consumed us and our family is broken in two.

We can choose to stay on the rooftop and maybe we see that as our only choice. Maybe we do not believe that father is on the other side of the smoke and blackness. Or maybe we

believe he is there and even hear him calling us to jump, but we don't trust him to catch us when we fall.

There will always be some of us caught on burning rooftops at different times in our lives. If we are not on the rooftop then we need to be on the ground with outstretched arms, calling out through the fire and smoke, letting our brother or sister know that we will be there for them, we will catch them when they jump.

Even if they protest that they cannot see us, that they do not need us, that they can survive the fire on their own. Still we urge them to move on, to jump through the blackness. We encourage them that we can see them through the smoke and that we will catch them, we will be there for them when they jump. And not only will we be there at the end of the jump, but God is already present with them and will stay with them as they pass through the fire and smoke.

And people are watching. Those same people we asked to come to church with us on Sunday morning. They are standing behind us and see the person caught on the burning rooftop. And they see us encouraging that person to jump, to make that leap of faith. And they will want to become a part of the light that breaks through the darkness reaching those people caught in fires and smoke and enabling them to get through it. Turning on our lights is the most effective and best witness we can possibly have as Christians.

Jesus says to us this morning, "You are like light for the whole world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bowl; instead he puts it on the lampstand, where it gives light for everyone in the house. In the same way your light must

shine before people, so that they will see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven.”

Ours is a world with many burning rooftops. God knows and we know that this is a world filled with the darkness of disease, death, broken relationships, crime, doubt, and despair. In the midst of all that darkness, Jesus Christ is the light of the world, and we as Christians are little lights. We are little lights in a world crying for more light from those burning rooftops.

Are our lights turned on? Do people caught in darkness and despair see or hear us calling from the other side? In our community, do we stand out as lights in the darkness? What kind of a witness are we providing for those onlookers who stand passively in the darkness behind us?

Whether we are helping with worship, Stephens Ministers, Communion Carriers, Parish Nurses, Counters, Food Pantry providers, Sunday School teachers, Board members, Meal preparers, Redeemer Crisis Center volunteers or whatever – it seems we can never do enough.

We all have a need, a responsibility to learn how to burn our lights a little brighter in our ministry to those surrounded by darkness and crisis.

Turn your light on a little brighter so that people can see it. So that family and friends know that you are there for them and not just for yourself.

Those of you who have been in small group Bible studies with me have heard some of the stories of my upbringing and the influence my grandparents had in my life. You have heard

me urge you as grandparents to take an active role in the upbringing and nurture of your grandchildren. To be burning lights in the lives of your grandchildren.

There is absolutely no way I would be here in this pulpit if it were not for my grandparents. It was my grandpa who first put the idea in my head of becoming a pastor. I always told him, “no way.” But the seed was planted. And with the light and nurture that seed received through my family, especially my grandparents, there was no stopping its growth.

They were truly a light in my life that brought me through several burning rooftops in high school, college, and seminary. They have given me an example to strive for. And now I will spend the rest of my life trying to share that light and spread that light of Christ to as many people in as many places as I possibly can.

This morning I not only share that light with you but I challenge you to turn on your own lights and share of yourselves with your grandchildren, children, and community. Don't save it. There is nothing to save it for.

Life is so very precious, but it cannot be saved up. For a life to be worthwhile and a blessing, life must be expended. Jesus said, “He that loses his life for my sake shall find it.” “We are the light for the whole world.” So we must expend ourselves for the good of the world, and to glorify God.

#677 – This Little Light of Mine

#815 – I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light