

Epiphany 5, February 5, 2023

Sermon Outline

3. The Blessed are bright.
2. Bright hearts bring Light Living.
1. Light Living is more, not less.

Whatever Your Shape or Color, Because of Jesus, You Are the Light of the World and Will Dwell in Eternal Light.

Sermon

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

My dear beloved flock, the text for our meditation today is the Holy Gospel according to Saint Matthew the fifth chapter verses thirteen through twenty. Focusing on verses fourteen and sixteen. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (Mt 5:14–16)

Boys and Girls, Good Morning, I pray that you are doing well today. Our text for today has a lot to say about light. What color of light do you like? If it were Christmas, we might say green or red or white or blue. But what color of *white* light do you like best? Do you like daylight, soft white, or bright-white? Do you like fluorescent or incandescent? Not all lights look the same. Fluorescent bulbs tend to be harsher. LEDs may look blue-ish. Some light bulbs can no longer be made legally, because the government says they're not efficient enough.

I hope God doesn't run an efficiency test on us. That thought occurred to me in hearing again the words of Jesus to his disciples, "You are the light of the world." How much light have we shined lately, compared to the energy God invests in us? While that question may make us squirm a little, God's Word today is really good news. It doesn't say we *should* be light, or we *must* shine brighter, or God will replace us. It helps us see that we who follow Jesus also brighten up the world. How can you brighten up the world? Ponder that question as you hear the rest of the sermon. You may go back to your seats and those who love you.

3.

Jesus had just described how *blessed* are those who have faith in him. Now, he talks

about how *bright* we are. When God created the world, the first command was “Let there be light” (Gen 1:3). Three days later, he created the sun and moon and stars to provide light by day and by night.

God is turning the lights on anew in Jesus. The sun and moon are still doing their jobs, of course, shining light on the earth, but there’s a job they can’t do. They cannot lighten the darkness of our sins. Many times, when a person is going the wrong way, we say we hope he or she will see the light. They might be in darkness in the middle of the day.

If a room is dark, there are several ways to bring light to it. We can open the shades or curtains if it’s daylight. We can flip a switch and let electricity light the room. We can light a candle, letting a match do the job. We can carry a flashlight or lantern. Light pierces the darkness and makes everything visible so we can see.

There’s only one way to pierce the darkness of sin and unbelief. God turns the lights on by bringing us to trust in Jesus. Jesus is the Light of the world, and His Light scatters the darkness of our sins. When Jesus said to the disciples “follow me,” his Word turned on the lights for them and scattered their darkness. They were changed.

Jesus does the same for us. His Light changes us. In the waters of Holy Baptism, we are taken out of the kingdom of darkness into His Kingdom of Light. We are made followers of Jesus, who is the Light of the World. Eph 5:8 says, “For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.”

Light can be painful. Maybe you’ve been awakened from dead sleep by a bright light. It hurts! “Turn it off! The Light, it burns!” we might say. That was how many reacted to Jesus when they heard him speak. Sin loves darkness. That is why many crimes don’t happen in broad daylight, but at night, or in the shadows.

Jesus had a different plan to drive out our darkness. He does not flip a switch or light a candle. Remark-ably, to turn on the lights for us meant that Jesus, the Light of the World, would be snuffed out like a candle. The powers of darkness of the world sought to snuff out Jesus on the cross. On Good Friday, it looked as though they’d succeeded. His lifeless body was laid in a cold, dark tomb. There were no windows in that tomb, for the eyes of the dead cannot see light. But in the bright light of Easter, Jesus threw open the door of grave and death! He’s opened wide the doors and windows to our graves, too, promising that we will live, even though we die (Jn 11:25)! We will dwell with him in eternal light forever (Rev 21:23)!

2.

But *forever* may be a long time from now. And *forever* was not the focus for Jesus on this particular day. Living in the Light aka Light Living means living *now* in the

light of Jesus. Light Living means living out what we really are: forgiven children of God. Our lives are designed to have tremendous impact in the world.

Followers of Jesus do not just *believe* differently than others; we *live* differently. Truth is, if we can't be easily distinguished from unbelievers, it's either because they're becoming like us or we're behaving like them. If the first, there's as much wrong with us as with them.

“Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works,” Jesus said (Mt 5:16). Following Jesus is about more than personal enlightenment. It is more than merely bettering ourselves for our own gain. Shades in the windows are good for privacy, but don't draw down the shades of your faith as you live through the week. A covered lamp is a waste of light, and so is concealed faith.

After all, Jesus says “You are the light of the world.” That is a tremendous joy, blessing, and responsibility. Following Jesus is not just for our personal benefit. It calls us to be the hope of the world. It's easy for us to find fault with society. It's common for us to complain that things are going from bad to worse and that evil seems to be spreading everywhere. No doubt, Jesus could see that also in his time. But instead of hand-wringing and complaining, Jesus one-by-one brought people out of darkness into the light. Then, the ones he brought to the light of faith he sent to make holes in the darkness wherever they went. God's people are God's force in the world, a force to be reckoned with. We are little Christ's, little lights in the midst of the darkness of the world, shining the light of Christ to those around us, almost like city from an airplane.

Perhaps you've had the chance to fly in an airplane at night. All you can see of communities and homes below are the points of light. From many miles away, that light identifies the town and the home. And such is God's plan for calling us to follow Jesus.

Our God says, “Let there be light where my people live.” Peter says it well: “Keep your conduct . . . honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation” (1 Pet 2:12).

1.

But Light Living as Jesus described is not about *less*, but *more*. For those who are in Christ, there is more joy, more power, more hope, and more purpose for living. The Word that brought the light of faith to us is also the Word that enables us to bring that light to the world.

The electricity that causes lights to shine is invisible until it stirs up and excites electrons and particles that are otherwise invisible. Faith is invisible to people until it brings light by stirring up Christians to love God and our neighbor. Faith that saves

also energizes.

And how does our light shine? Not through heroic acts or feats of superhuman strength. Not through brilliant insights or miraculous powers. But by following Jesus. Jesus came not to abolish God's Law but to fulfill God's Law, which shows concrete love for other people. And though we do it imperfectly, loving our God and our neighbor makes faith visible.

Most would consider a mission trip to Haiti to build a school a good work. So is clearing your neighbors' walk, taking out the trash, putting away the dishes, or taking your children to church, or having devotions with them, or holding your temper, or not lying, or forgiving, or confessing your sins and asking for forgiveness instead of blaming or excusing. This shares the light given to you.

The light of Christ shines in the ordinary life of a Christian, but we are not called to live in an ordinary way. Because the Spirit of God is moving us, and Christ is dwelling in us, Christians can be extraordinary husbands and wives and parents, remarkable neighbors and employees, powerful citizens and friends.

The disciples were often dim in reflecting the love of Jesus, and so are we. Thank God he is patient and does not quickly discard us when we fail. He leads us to repent, to renounce the ways of sin and darkness, to be forgiven for the sake of Jesus' cross, and to strive anew to follow him. When we love as God loves, people will take notice. That may well lead others to see a light of hope at the end of the tunnel of darkness. That light is Jesus, and we should be happy to give him the credit. We can do no good thing apart from him.

Light bulbs come in all different kinds, and Christians do, too, but

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May someone this week, or this day, see the light of Jesus in your Light Living and give thanks to God.

The Peace of God which surpasses all understanding, guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.