

Sermon 10-4-26 Discipleship: Share Matthew 5:14-16

When I was in elementary school, we often went on field trips to Sonora Caverns in Sonora, Texas. It's a beautiful cavern, and I always enjoyed going there, except for one part of the tour: the moment they turned out all the lights to show how dark it is deep in a cave. In my elementary school mind, I always worried what would happen if the light switch failed. I knew the guide also had a flashlight, but what if it failed too? How would we find our way back? How many of us would be eaten by unseen monsters or fall to our deaths off the path? How many years would our bones lie at the bottom of the cave before someone finally came to find us? With such thoughts in my head, you can imagine there was no one more relieved when the lights in the cavern finally came back on.

If you've ever experienced such deep darkness, you know how disorienting and, for some, fear-inducing it can be. We modern humans do not often experience this type of darkness. We have light everywhere whenever we want it. We just flip a switch, and it's there. So you likely haven't thought recently about how much light humans need to exist. Most obviously, our eyes do not work very well in the dark. We are not nocturnal creatures. We need light to see, which is crucial for our safety and survival (as anyone who has stepped on a Lego in the dark knows). Light also transmits warmth from our sun, creating our weather and the rain that sustains us. This light allows plants to generate energy, which is necessary for all life on Earth. If you focus light enough into a laser, you can even use it for medical and creative purposes (and for shooting your enemies in sci-fi movies).

This preciousness of light is likely why light has always been used as a symbol of spiritual insight and of God. Early in the creation narrative of Genesis, God declares that there should be light, knowing it will bring life to the cosmos. In the Gospel of John, the life of Jesus is described as the light of the world, giving spiritual light to everyone. In the book of Revelation, the New Jerusalem is described as a place where there is no need of sun or moon because God's glory is the sun and Jesus is the lamp by which we will see. In this new world, God will create a place where there is never night.

And here, in this passage, Jesus tells those listening and us today that letting our light shine is part of what it means to be his disciple. Jesus tells all of us that our light should not be hidden. In fact, hiding the light goes against its very purpose. Light is meant to illuminate. Jesus tells the gathered crowd and us today that we are the light, not just for ourselves, but for the whole world.

I believe that Jesus' illustration about letting our light shine ties directly to this last week of our discipleship series, which is based on our church vision: share. To let your light shine is to share your experiences of God with the world. To let our light shine is to share our lives in God with each other. It is to live in loving, open community with each other in our church community and with the entire world.

I know that the idea of sharing your faith life with others sometimes carries a negative connotation. Maybe you have experienced church hurt in a church space that was supposed to be supportive when you shared what God was doing in your life, but it ended up being abusive. Maybe you felt the pressure to share your faith was coercive or emotionally manipulative. I have experienced that myself throughout my time in church. I was made to feel less than because sharing my faith life with the world was difficult for me. I was told that if I had true faith, sharing my faith should be easy. Just do it! In my youth group growing up, we were given tracts to hand out and told that the one who handed out the most tracts to people to tell them about Jesus would get some candy. (A tract is a small booklet or pamphlet that contains a gospel message.) I wasn't really interested in going up to strangers and talking to them about Jesus, so I left all my tracts in bathrooms! I still got the candy, and maybe someone heard about Jesus. This probably wasn't what my youth leaders had in mind when they gave us this challenge, but I just felt uncomfortable with the whole situation. I still don't feel very comfortable with this "in your face" style of evangelism.

So I take a lot of comfort from Jesus' preaching in this passage, and here's why. Obtaining light in our everyday lives is easy. We just flip a switch, and it's there. But the hearers of Jesus' sermon

would not have had this luxury. When Jesus mentioned light, he and his hearers would not have envisioned the easy lighting of a spotlight, but the difficult process of lighting a candle or oil lamp, which would seem dim by comparison to our modern lighting. I think Jesus is acknowledging that sharing our light can be tough. It requires hard work. Letting our light shine comes from the struggles of life. It comes from our doubts and our fears. So if sharing feels hard for you, hear this as good news. Jesus knows it can be hard.

We don't have to be perfect to share. Look at who Jesus is preaching to: the crowds. The people who need the beatitudes. The people who possess good attributes, such as purity of heart, a hunger and thirst for righteousness, and peacemaking, as well as those who are poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who are meek, and those who are reviled and persecuted. When we share the light of God, we do so with all we have, with all of our lives. The good news is that God can use it all. Often, I have found that the testimony that makes the most impact doesn't come from a place of strength but from a place of weakness, where God's work is evident in our lives in all their messiness.

Because all God asks us to do is to do good works and reflect the light we have, which is God's glory, not ours. When we reflect God's glory by sharing what God has done through us, people see our good works for what they are: not a way to prop us up or make ourselves look good, but a way for Christ to be incarnate in this world today, through all of us who make up the body of Christ.

One of the best ways I have seen this illustrated through art is in Eastern Orthodox icons of Mary, the mother of Jesus. In almost every icon of Mary, she is with Jesus and not on her own. Also, in almost all of those images, she is physically pointing to Jesus. Her role in the icon, reflecting her role in life, is to direct the viewer's gaze to Christ. She is still Mary, a human being distinct from Jesus, but her purpose is to draw the viewer to see Jesus and learn to love him.



I believe this is what it means to shine our light. We are to direct those who see our good works to Jesus, our light. The purpose of the Christian life is not to build up our own spheres of influence. It is not to gather more power or wealth for ourselves. It is to grow in sharing so that others may see God at work in the world through us, the body of Christ. When we honestly examine our discipleship path and resolve to grow in our willingness to share, we become increasingly open to shining God's light in the world. I encourage you to do this today and to resolve to find a place where you can learn to share more of God's light with others.

Fortunately, we don't have to do this alone. When Jesus says you are the light of the world, it is a plural you. In Texan, he would say, "Y'all are the light of the world!" While our light may be dim, when combined with the light of others, it can hold back the darkness. Every Christmas Eve, we illustrate this concept during our candlelight service. When the room is dim, we can see little. Then Pastor Tommy lights his candle from the Christ candle and begins lighting others' candles. Each of those people lights others' candles, and before long, the room is bathed in light. We can all see each other as the light of God allows us to see God's work among us. Then we take those lights out into the world and, symbolically, seek to light the candles of others. We seek to share, to awaken them to new life so they can go and share with others. Each of us in the church is here because someone was bold enough to let

their light shine so that we could see. May we all be that someone for another, sharing God's glory with all. Amen.