

God our Father, on a hillside in Galilee, your Son Jesus called us to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Give us the strength and wisdom to become the people of the Beatitudes in our day, so that our words may season the world with the flavor of the Gospel and our lives be shining examples of Jesus who is the true Light of the world. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

## **GO LIGHT YOUR WORLD**

We are living in a different age than when most of us went to school. They call this new age the Post-Modern World. As disciples of Christ, we are faced with new challenges to light our world for Christ.

One hinderance is that Americans' membership in houses of worship continued to decline. In 2021 attendance dropped below 50% for the first time in Gallup's eight-decade trend. In 2020, 47% of Americans said they belonged to a church, synagogue or mosque, down from 50% in 2018 and 70% in 1999. Since the turn of the century, the percentage of U.S. adults with no religious affiliation has more than doubled, from 8% to 19%. The sad thing is that the unchurched population has grown from 24% to 34%.

A growing number of people are leaving the church for a new reason: They are not leaving because they have lost faith, they are leaving the church to preserve their faith! Americans now view an invitation to become a Christian means you are offering them an invitation to convert to your church; to join a club.

So, you can build the perfect church to try to gain them, but they still won't come. That's why I like today's theme: "GO Light Your World." We can no longer wait for them to come to us. We have got to go to them!

Even though interest in the organized church is down, the Gallup poll indicates that the vast majority of Americans have an interest in spirituality. They are turned off to "church," but not to Jesus.

I believe the harvest is ripe, but if we are going to reach them for the Lord, we are going to have to recapture our mission! The Body of Christ, the true Bride, was and still is God's chosen instrument to expand His kingdom - not churchianity!!

Those who are outside of Christ are desperate to find spiritual meaning in their life. Churchianity has left them empty. But if we recapture our mission, Fifth Ave. United Methodist Church, know and believe that Jesus has the power to transform the personal lives of those that we shine our light on.

The reason the early church spread like wildfire is because people had a personal encounter with Jesus and they couldn't keep silent about it. They went to the market streets and even to other cities to tell others what Jesus did for them. It's getting in touch with Jesus at the core of your being that is going to generate the excitement that will propel each of us out into our world with the news Jesus can change their lives.

So, what has to change if we are to recapture our mission? I think it's going to require that God recaptures our heart. We are going to have to see the lost as He sees them - our heart has got to break where His breaks and we have to genuinely care and serve those He sends us OUT to serve.

There is a familiar phrase that says, "Four months more and then the harvest. I tell you; servants open your eyes and look at the fields. They are ripe for harvest." Familiar? But can you tell me where Jesus was when He said it? He was in Samaria at the well with the woman He just offered Living Water. Why would Jesus tell His disciples to open their eyes to see the harvest? It's apparent the disciples never saw the Samaritan woman; they couldn't see the harvest!

It's amazing what we don't see when we are not looking! Jesus' strategy was to go where the sinners are. Salt and light don't and won't work very well from a distance. Instead of withdrawing from the people for fear of

contamination, their issues rubbing off, fear of other - Jesus ate with them. The beautiful thing is our churches are full of people who are already out there in the markets - their jobs, volunteering or enjoying life - have put them there! We just need to ignite their fire so they see they are already standing in the middle of the mission field, and to build relationships with these people and pray for the opportunities to share how Jesus can help them with their present struggle. Many people are frozen at the mouth, but if they have their heart ignited with a fresh fire of a recaptured the Fifth Ave. mission - make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world - that fire will melt them and you won't be able to stop their witnessing that transformed their life.

Everyone in your church is already embedded in the community where people are searching for significance for their life where the hurting are open to an encouraging word and a helping hand. What we must do is help them build the bridge back to a relationship with God by being authentic with them. They are very open to building a genuine relationship with the One who can turn their lives around! When you help them do that, then they will naturally want to fellowship with those who embrace God too!

Someone once said the most important light in a house isn't the expensive chandelier. It's the little nightlight in the hallway! Why? Because that's the one that prevents you from stubbing your toe in the middle of the night! Our churches are full of little night lights...they just need to be out there in someone else's darkness to show them the way back to a relationship with God!

The superior love of Jesus that is conveyed in your genuine concern, your touch, and your service will find a receptive heart for the seed of the Gospel to produce a harvest! We all have the potential to restore their disconnectedness with God; the God who created them for a meaningful relationship with Him. We are embodied with the Spirit of Jesus - the One who moved beyond words and embodies the message that the Father loves them!

Our Post-Modern World is hungry for meaning and connectedness. Like the Samaritan woman, they have made a trip to the well, but the Lord's disciples don't see them and so they go home empty once again. I can't think of a riper harvest than that for a genuine relationship with God. Almost everyone experiences hurt and brokenness. That's what unites us as football fans, being members of a family, having relationships, being members of a church - we all try to escape the pain of our brokenness. Restaurants, concerts, stadium are packed with people, but Americans are the loneliest people in the world. They are trying to connect with someone even if only for a couple of hours but they go home still broken and without satisfying relationships.

Hear the Good News Fifth Ave. United Methodist Church – hear the voice of our Saviour saying - GO! Go in the mission fields. They are WHITE and ready for harvest! Do you see them? Do you SEE them? THEN GO...TAKE THE LIGHT INTO THEIR DARKNESS!!

**As I close this sermon, I invite each of you to prepare your hearts and minds to come to the Table of the Lord in a spirit of gratitude, giving thanks to God for planting the seeds of grace in our hearts and calling each of us to be disciples of Jesus Christ and praying that, through us, in the coming week, the light of God's grace may shine brightly upon someone who needs to know Christ's saving love. Come. All are invited! All are welcomed!**