

INI - SDG

February 13, 2011

6th Sunday a. Epiphany

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church

Hecla, SD

Text: Matthew 5:14-16 ***"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."***

Theme: YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

- You cannot be hidden
- You should not be hidden
- You shine to give glory to the Father

Service intro: Epiphany is a season of light: star of Bethlehem...

Dear fellow luminaries of the world, fellow redeemed in Christ Jesus,

Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day. (Gen 1:3-5)
Light. Light is the first thing that God created in the beginning. It's interesting, isn't it, that while light was created on the first day of creation, the sun, moon, and stars weren't created until day four. So the sun cannot take credit for bringing light to creation, it was God who gave light to His creation days before the sun existed!

Throughout Scripture the work of God is associated with light in several different ways. Last month we heard Jesus says that He is ***"the light of the world."*** (Jn 8:12) He brought light into this dark and dying world of sin, much like God made created light out of the dark chaos on the first day of creation. Jesus is light because He is the only source of eternal life, as opposed to the eternal darkness of hell. God's Word, the Bible, is also spoken of as being light. The Psalmist writes, ***"Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path."*** (Ps 119:105) God's Word guides us to our Savior Jesus and shows us that He is our only Savior from sin and hope for eternal life. Scripture also talks of believers as being "in the light" as opposed to the darkness of unbelief. Paul writes to the Ephesians, ***"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord."*** (Eph 5:8)

Every object that projects beams of light has a source for that light. The sunlight we enjoyed so much yesterday has as its source the burning gases of the sun. The light that comes from this flashlight, comes from the electricity produced by its battery causing the bulb in this light to shine. This morning we hear from Jesus that as believers in Christ we are "The light of the world." The source of our light is Jesus Himself. We reflect Him who is the light of the world. When the Holy Spirit created faith in our hearts, we speak of Him as having

“enlightened us with His gifts.” The Holy Spirit made us the light of the world. The Christian is light in the Lord as opposed to the darkness of unbelief and sin that is in everything else in this world. We have been rescued from the darkness, brought into the light of God by the Holy Spirit, and now have ourselves become the light of the world.

As the light of the world, Jesus teaches us some very special truths this morning in our text. As the light of the world we cannot be hidden, should not be hidden, but instead shine in order to give glory to our Father! May the Holy Spirit who made us the light of the world help us to shine!

YOU CANNOT BE HIDDEN

Who here likes to stick out? For instance, when you are walking in a crowded mall, which of you would like to stick out like a sore thumb in that crowd? Few, if any of us. There are, however, people I know who like to stick out in a crowd. So rather than wearing commonly colored clothes, they will wear bright neon colors. They want to be noticed as being different. Some of us may want to be noticed, but we do not want to be noticed for being different.

Well, dear Christians, I have some news for you. As believers in Christ you are different. You are different from a majority of the world. The number of believers on earth has always been a small minority. In the days of Elijah the prophet, God said that there were only seven thousand men who were following him. (Rom 11:4) A majority of the world has rejected Jesus as their Savior from sin and are living in unbelief or worshiping a false god. Whether we are talking about the un-religious person who just tries to live a good life, or the many false religions of the world - the Buddhist, the Muslim, the spiritualist, or even most Catholics - they are all told that the only way you can get to heaven is by your good works. You have to live a good enough life, you have to obey the tenants of their particular religion, in order to impress God enough that He will let you into heaven, paradise, or nirvana. They are all based on work-righteousness.

You, however, are different. Your faith, the Christian faith, is different from anything else in the world. You believe that your only hope for eternal life is Jesus. He had to earn heaven for you. He had to live a perfect life in your place. He had to suffer and die to pay off your debt of sin. He had to rise from the dead to free you from the bondage of death and sin. And only through faith in Him are you credited with righteousness. You believe that only through Him are justified in God’s sight.

Even this faith you have, you believe you cannot take credit for. You believe that God the Holy Spirit has changed your heart and your life. Now you live for God and not for yourself. You believe you are His temple, His dwelling place. You are the light of the world. You are different.

Jesus says in our text, **“A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.”** We can understand exactly what Jesus is saying here. Because a hill is elevated above its surroundings, if someone builds a city on it, there is no way of hiding it. It cannot be hidden because of its very nature. Especially at night, when all the townspeople have their houselights and streetlights on. For miles around, that city will be aglow in the darkness of night.

As the light of the world, you are that city set on a hill. You cannot be hidden. The rest

of the world can see you as Christian and is watching you. They see you dressed up on Sunday mornings and they figure that you must have gone to church. You are different from the rest of the world and thank the Lord for that! I don't mean that in a snobbish or stuck-up way. As if we are better than the world because we Christians. We are no better than anyone else on this planet. There but for the grace of God, go I. We thank the Lord that He has rescued us from the darkness of unbelief and pray that as a city set on a hill, people may see us from the darkness of unbelief and we can shine the light of Jesus on their hearts as well! So know this, as the light of the world you cannot be hidden.

YOU SHOULD NOT BE HIDDEN

How does it make you feel to hear that as a Christian, it means that you are different from the rest of the world? How does it feel to hear from Jesus that you cannot be hidden? That your life as a follower of Christ is out there for the world to see? Maybe we feel embarrassed. After all we spend so much of our time and energy trying to fit in. As we mentioned last week, we're willing to go to great lengths just to fit in. We do not want people to see us as different. We want to be with the "in" and "cool" crowd. So we use the same fowl language and tell the same dirty jokes that the world tells. We join in with the under-aged drinking parties. We want to listen to the music and watch the movies that the world speaks approvingly of. Oh, the lengths we are willing to go to avoid being seen as different.

But Jesus says that you are the light of the world! What is the purpose of light, but to shine! Verse 15 of our text, ***"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."*** Nobody does that. Nobody lights a lamp and then puts a basket over it to cover up the light it is giving. While we might not light lamps in our houses today, we get what Jesus is saying. When it gets dark outside, none of us turns on a lamp in our house and immediately covers it up with a blanket to keep the light from shining. That would defeat the purpose of light in the first place.

The analogy Jesus is making here is that as the light of the world we should not hide our faith. Imagine if the sun in the sky behaved like that. Imagine if the sun thought, "Well out here in space everything is black and dark except for me. The planets in my solar system don't give off any light of their own like me. I'd much rather fit in with my surroundings than risk being seen as different from the rest of my solar system." With that the sun would then go black and no one would benefit from its light. You are the light of the world. A light that should not be hidden!

YOU SHINE TO GIVE GLORY TO THE FATHER

Rather than hiding your faith, Jesus says, "Let it shine!" ***"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."*** You are the light of the world, you were made to shine. And you shine by the way you live your life. You shine by the good works that you do.

We know what works are good in God's sight. We have a summary of what is good in the 10 Commandments. It is good to fear, love, and trust in God above everything else. It is good to not take God's name in vain but to use it to call upon Him in every trouble, to pray to Him, to praise Him, and to give thanks to Him. It is good to remember the Sabbath day by

gladly hearing and learning God's Word. It is good to honor our father and our mother. It is good to help and be a friend to our neighbor in every bodily need. It is good to honor and love our own spouses. It is good to help our neighbor improve and protect his property and business. It is good to defend our neighbor, to speak well of him, and to put the best construction on everything. It is good to help our neighbor, be of service to him, and urge him to stay in do his duties.

These are ways in which we let the light of our faith shine. Our faith in Jesus is an inward light which shines its beams in the world through our works. What makes these works good is faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. **"He who abides in Me,"** Jesus says, **"and I in him, bears much fruit."** (Jn 15:5) In Jesus we live fruitful lives. Our faith shines through our good works. Good works which the Holy Spirit produces in us. It is faith in Jesus producing works of love for God and our neighbor.

Notice who these good works benefit. **"That (others) may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."** This is the opposite of the world's motivation for doing their "good" deeds. The billionaire wants his charitable giving to be published so people will praise him for his generosity. The monks and nuns think that by taking vows of celibacy and poverty they will benefit because God will reward them for doing this. All of this is selfish and self-centered. It is doing good for the sake of self.

But as the light of the world, we let our light shine that our Father in heaven may get the glory for what we have done. When men see that our lives are different, when they see the love of Christ at work in our lives, when they see the fruits of faith that abound in our lives they give glory to our Father who created us, made us the light of the world, and caused such good works to abound in our lives. Some may glorify the Father in this life as from the darkness they are attracted to the light that they see shining from us. They see we are different. We are the city on a hill and they want to find out what makes us different. We then have the opportunity to bring the Word to them, whereby the Holy Spirit brings them into the light. Or it may not happen that they glorify the Father until Judgment Day, as we heard Peter write in our New Testament lesson, **"They may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation."** (1 Pt 2:10) But the purpose of letting our light shine is to give glory to God who called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light.

"Let there be light!" These first creating words of God could be echoed in our lives in several different ways. God said, "Let there be light" when He sent His Son into the world to be the Savior of the world. God said, "Let there be light" in our hearts when He called us to faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. God said, "Let there be light" in our lives as we let the light of our faith shine in the world through good works. May the Father ever keep us as the light of the world, may He forgive us for the times we tried to hide our faith, and may He ever work in us to will and to do according to His good pleasure. To God be all the glory! Amen.