

Go Light Your World  
“This Little Light of Mine”  
Matthew 5:14-26

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Do you know how many T.V. evangelists it takes to change a light bulb? “One, but for the message to continue, send in your donation today.” How many Episcopalians does it take to change a light bulb? “What? Change a light bulb? My grandmother donated that light bulb.” How many Baptists does it take to change a light bulb? “At least 109, one to change the bulb, 100 to serve on various committees to decide what company should supply the bulb, and 8 to decide who brings the potato salad and fried chicken.” How many Amish does it take to change a light bulb? “What’s a light bulb?” How many Methodists does it take to change a light bulb? “The Council of Bishops released this statement: We choose not to make a statement either in favor of or against the need for a light bulb. However, if, in your own journey, you have found that a light bulb works for you that is fine. You are invited to write a poem or compose a modern dance about your personal relationship with your light bulb and present it next month at our annual Light Bulb Sunday Service, in which we will explore a number of light bulb traditions including incandescent, fluorescent, 3-way, long-life, and tinted, all of which are equally valid paths to luminescence.”

The Church, through the centuries, has had a love affair with light. We light candles even when it is not dark. Our own denominational logo is the cross and the flame. Jesus said, *“You are the light of the world. Let your light shine before people that they may see your good works and praise your Father in heaven.”* You are called by Christ to “go light your world.”

**OUR LIGHTS ARE LIT FROM AN OUTSIDE SOURCE**

It takes major power plants to furnish us electricity. It takes a match to light a candle. Before the days of matches, producing a spark was a complicated process of rubbing stones together. Light bulbs don’t shine on their own. Candles don’t glow by themselves.

*On the first day of Creation, God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw that the light was good and he separated the light from darkness. In a heated discussion with religious authorities, Jesus declares, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”* We are not self-ignited. We are not the source of light. We do not shine on our own. The flame comes from beyond us.

Alex Haley, noted author who wrote great books like Roots, used to say, “I keep a portrait of a turtle sitting on a fence post in my office. Every time I get an award

or receive a good book review, I take a long look at that turtle and remember that he didn't get on top of that fence post by himself."

Will you let the Holy Spirit light your fire? A Mississippi country preacher prayed before he preached, "O Lord, give this thy servant this morning the eyes of an eagle, and the wisdom of an owl. Illuminate my brow with the sun of heaven, and possess my mind with the love of people. Turpentine my imagination. Grease my lips. Electrify my brain with the light of the Word and fill me plumb full of dynamite for thy glory. Anoint me all over with the kerosene of salvation and set me on fire!"

If that is too lengthy a prayer for you, you might pray, "Come, Holy Spirit, blow like the wind, burn like a fire, kindle a flame of love in these cold hearts of ours." Oh, that we who call ourselves Methodists could live up to our logo."

### **OUR LIGHTS ARE MEANT TO SHINE**

Listen to this teaching of Jesus: *"People do not light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on a stand and it gives light to everyone in the house."*

Light was hard to come by in the first century Palestine. There was no electricity. And there were no matches. So you never casually put the light out. When you left the house, for safety reasons, you put the oil lamp under a bowl and the room would darken until your return. Lights are not meant to be permanently hidden. Lights are made to shine. Darkness can only exist in the absence of light.

It is one thing to curse the darkness, it is quite another to light a candle. We can rant and rave about corruption in high places, and poverty in low places. We can abhor violence in all places and pornography in numerous places. But the question is not "Why is there darkness?" The question is, "Where is the light?" Why aren't we shining? Maybe it is time to turn up the lights. Instead of holding political rallies, the Church would do well to shine the love of Christ into the darkest corners of the earth.

Sitting in this room right now are doctors, nurses, school teachers, students, housewives, house husbands, business people and builders, lawyers and church workers. Is your light shining? If you doubt your light matters, take this little quiz.

1. Name the five wealthiest people in the world.
  2. Name the last five Heisman trophy winners.
  3. Name the last five winners of the Miss America Pageant.
- Do you know all these answers? Probably not.

Ask yourself some additional questions:

1. Who fed and clothed you when you were helpless?
2. What was the name of your 1<sup>st</sup> grade teacher?
3. Who is the first friend you would call in an emergency?

You do know the answers to these questions.

In between the steps, is your light shining? A university professor was invited to speak at a military base in December. He was met at an airport by an unforgettable soldier named Ralph. This is the professor's story: "After we introduced ourselves to each other, we headed toward the baggage claim area. But Ralph kept disappearing. Once he stopped to help an older woman with her baggage. Once he stopped to lift two toddlers up to see Santa Claus, and again, he paused to give directions to someone who was lost." Finally I said, "Where did you learn that?" "What?" asked Ralph. "Where did you learn to live like that?" Ralph replied, "During the war I was in Vietnam. My job was to clear the mine fields. You never knew which step might be your last so I learned to live between the steps. I guess I just keep living that way." This little light of mine, am I going to let it shine?

### **OUR LIGHTS MUST GIVE THEMSELVES FOR THE CAUSE**

Candles melt. Bulbs burn out. The sun sets. *To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven.*

Burnout is one of the buzz words of our day. Distressed people burnout. Self-centered people burnout. Self-sufficient people burnout. Unprepared people burnout.

Jesus said there were five wise and five foolish virgins at a wedding. The five wise virgins had sufficient oil. The five foolish virgins ran out of oil. In their frantic effort to replenish their supply, they missed the party.

A man pumping gas next to a woman with a van load of children asked the lady, "Are all those your children or are you having a picnic?" The harried mother responded, "All these are my children and no, it's not a picnic!"

"I can't take it anymore," George lamented, "everyone wants a piece of me and there is just so much to go around." We know about burnout. So, how can we get the most years out of life and the most life out of our years?

Let Christ increase while we decrease. That is what John the Baptist did. When competition broke out between the disciples of John and the disciples of Jesus, John stepped in and said, "He must increase and I must decrease." He is the bridegroom, I am just an attendant." My mother used to put it this way, "Only one life, 'twill soon be passed. Only what is done for Christ will last."

Jesus put it this way: *"Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."* Church may be the only institution in society encouraging people to live beyond self-centeredness. That is why summer youth mission and music experiences are so critical.

You are the light of the world. Is your light hiding or shining?

