

Sermon: Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany, Year A

Matthew 5:13-20

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St. Luke's ~ San Lucas Episcopal Church

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I want to begin by telling you a story that happened to me when I was a church planter in Seattle a few years ago.

Someone asked me how I was doing and how my ministry was going. As I reflected in that moment, I told this person — a fellow church planter — that it was a difficult time for me, and I explained the reasons why. I spoke about the many challenges and struggles that come with starting a new ministry.

After the conversation ended, I found myself reflecting on what I had shared, and I realized that I had been focusing mostly on the negative and obscure parts of my story. Yes, I had spoken about my challenges and problems, and I had said nothing about my blessings or the positive aspects of my ministry.

At the end of that conversation, I recognized that my light had not been shining at all. I realized that I had not been sending out any light. Looking back now, I can acknowledge that I had allowed the shadows to define my story.

I wasn't sending a light that could have transformed the person who was asking me... and, with my example, inspire that person to shine. I was missing a great opportunity.

So, light — what is light?

Scripture reminds us that in the beginning, as we see in the book of Genesis, God spoke creation into being.

The breath of God — the Ruah — the divine wind — moved over the waters, and the first words spoken into the chaos were these: 'Let there be light.'

Yes, the first words that God used at the moment of creation were these:
"Let there be light, and there was light."

Light is the first manifestation of the created universe and the tool by which this universe is being revealed.

Just think about it...

It is no wonder that our scriptures are filled with references and images of light, like the ones we heard today. We acknowledge God as our light and salvation, the source of life itself. We read in the Psalms.

And in Jesus Christ, the light takes flesh, and that light shines in the darkness.

And today, in the Gospel of Matthew, we heard something unique:

“You are the light of the world.”

Jesus does not say, *I am the light of the world.*

He turns to the disciples — ordinary people, people who are unsure, imperfect, still learning — and he says:

“You are the light of the world.”

“Not that you will be someday.

Not that you must strive to become.

But that you already are.”

That you already are the light of the world...

And Jesus says this to us.

This is not primarily a command to achieve something — it is a truth about who we are.

It is our identity.

And this identity — who we are as light — is of profound importance right now.

Because we are living in turbulent times — both in our country and in our world — many people may feel disoriented and uncertain. Our conversations are often polarized, and it can feel as if fear and anger speak louder than compassion or understanding.

We may carry anxieties about the future: about justice, about the well-being of our communities. It can feel overwhelming at times — as I preached last week — as if the darkness around us threatens to extinguish hope.

We become overwhelmed by news cycles, by division, by uncertainty — and slowly, without realizing it, we may start to believe that darkness is stronger than light.

And yet, even in moments like this, the gospel invites us to remember who we are:
We are the light of the world.

Our calling to be light is not diminished by fear or confusion. On the contrary, it is precisely in these turbulent times that the light within us matters most.

And in moments like these, we may ask:
How do we navigate these turbulent times?
Where do we find true direction?

Jesus' answer is both simple and profound:
Navigate by the light — and become the light.

You see, in ancient times, light was not just symbolic; it was essential for survival. Travelers navigated by stars. Sailors crossed oceans by looking at constellations. A small flame could mean safety, direction, hope.

Light helps us see where we are — and where we are going.

And Jesus says that we — the community of disciples — are meant to be that light for the world. Not a light hidden away. We are invited to be a city on a hill: visible, present.

So, I wonder,
What does it mean to be light today?

Some time ago, I read a beautiful meditation. It said that a candle does not lose any of its light by lighting another candle. One candle can ignite a thousand others — and yet its own light remains just as bright. A candle never loses its light.

One of the most powerful experiences in the Episcopal tradition is the Easter Vigil. The church begins in darkness. A single flame is lit with the Paschal Candle. And then, one by one, each person lights their candle from another. And something remarkable happens:

As the light spreads, no one loses their flame. The light multiplies. That is how God works in the world. In the same way, each of us is invited to be a light in the world.

I am pretty sure that sharing your light — through acts of love, kindness, and compassion — will never diminish your light. On the contrary, it will allow your light to multiply, touching lives far beyond your own.

This is exactly what Jesus invites us to do when he says, *“You are the light of the world; let your light shine before all.”*

Each act of light we offer to ourselves and others becomes part of a greater radiance, revealing God's presence in the world.

Yes, we are made for shining, for illuminating, for giving light to all. That is our purpose in life.

And perhaps that is exactly what Jesus invites us into today: not to carry the weight of the world alone, but to share the light that has been given to us.

“You are the light of the world.”

We are participants in God's ongoing creation.

So I wonder again,

Will we remember who you are?

Will you choose to shine?

Will you become a light for others?

Because someone around you right now is trying to find their way. Someone is searching for hope. Someone is waiting for a sign that goodness still exists.

And your light — your presence, your kindness, your faithfulness, your compassion — may be the very thing that guides them all.

So today, as you come to the table and receive the Body and Blood of Christ, remember this: You are receiving light.

The same light spoken into creation.
The same light that shines in Jesus Christ.
The same light now entrusted to you.

And when you leave this place, go into the world and let your light shine — so that others may see and know that God is still at work in you, in our community, and in the world.

Amen.

A note from the preacher:

Because sermons are meant to be preached and therefore prepared with emphasis on verbal presentation (i.e., they are written for the ear), the written accounts occasionally deviate from proper and generally accepted principles of grammar and punctuation. Most often, these deviations are not mistakes per se but are indicative of an attempt to aid the listener in the delivery of the sermon.