# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“Let Your Light Shine”**

**Matthew 5:14-16**

 **March 12, 2023**

We have spent the first couple months of this year with Jesus’ beatitudes in Matthew chapter 5. We said of them that they characterize the inner life of the follower of Christ who seeks to become like him. Those who, like Christ, have God as their heavenly Father will be blessed, for they realize their need for God, they mourn their sin, they are humble, they hunger and thirst for righteousness, they are merciful, their hearts are pure, and they work for peace. Living according to these Beatitudes, the inner light of the believer grows brighter as it becomes more and like the One who is the Light of the world. Now, says Jesus, let your light shine for all to see. I invite you to turn with me to Matthew 5:14-16

“You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.”

“You are the light of the world.” Later Jesus will say, “I am the light of the world.” Combining these statements, Jesus is teaching us that as his followers we inherit his mission of being light in the world, that is, of being the visible presence of God who is light. While Jesus was here on earth, people saw the light of God in him. Now that he is no longer bodily and visibly on earth, you and I are called by him to be the ones in who people see the light of God. Paul says it this way in his letter to the Philippians: “You shine like stars in the universe.” Wouldn’t it be splendid if we shone so brightly that non-Christians, curious to discover the source of our light, were to come to us and say: “Twinkle, twinkle, little star, how I wonder what you are.”

Jesus tells us in our passage that it is through our good deeds that our light will shine. Let’s say something more about these good deeds. There are good deeds of faith and there are good deeds of love. Good deeds of faith include telling others the truth of the Gospel, which declares that all have sinned but through the death of Christ there is forgiveness and reconciliation with God, resulting in eternal life. Good deeds of faith also involve teaching the Bible, the Word of God, whether to fellow believers to help them grow in their faith, or to non-believers to help them understand the Christian faith. Conversations with those who do not yet know Christ, small group Bible studies that meet here at church and in homes, the Wednesday evening gathering of *The Story* where we are creatively exploring the story of God’s engagement with his people, and many other gatherings around the Bible are all good deeds of faith that shine the light of Christ.

Good deeds of love express our care for others through practical, visible works of compassion. God wants us meeting needs and getting involved where people are hurting, thereby shining the light of his love for the world. Good deeds of love are being practiced daily here in our family of faith. In our care for one another, especially in times of sorrow or struggle, we are shining God’s light for each other. In our care for those in our community, through such ministries as Family Promise, Angel Tree, and various food and blanket drives, we are letting our light shine. Beyond our local community, through the Matousek’s ministry in Haiti and Mission Aviation Fellowship in Brazil, and wherever God may lead us, the inner character of who we are in Christ is shining forth in service.

Letting our light shine will bring opposition from those who prefer the darkness. As Jesus said in the eighth beatitude, there will be persecution for doing right. But before we shrink back from shining our light and keeping it to ourselves, hiding it under the basket of our fear of what others might say or do when we shine for Christ, we need to think about the cost of refusing to shine the light of Christ. There is a cost of discipleship, but there is also a cost of non-discipleship. To let our light shine by loving our enemies is hard, but is it really better to live a life of hatred? Hasn’t that kind of darkness living brought our world to the dreadful state in which we find ourselves today? Walking daily with God according to Jesus’ beatitudes, shining his light and experiencing God’s blessing, is so satisfying that it far outweighs any unpleasantness we might experience in this world.

When I was in high school, I attended a two-week summer adventure camp. Each day included a difficult mental or physical challenge, such as rock climbing and rappelling, negotiating a high ropes course some forty feet off the ground, a 15-mile run, and a 24-hour solo where we were left completely alone in the woods. It was during that solo that I really came to appreciate the presence of light. Being alone during the day wasn’t that bad, but as the sun set and it starting getting dark, I began to feel anxious. Then, out in the far distance, I saw a light. It was our counselors who had lit a campfire on a high spot, visible to each one of us who were spending the night alone in the woods. Suddenly, I didn’t feel so alone.

There are people all around us who need someone to be a light for them. Lonely, hurting, afraid, confused, they need help in the dark places of their life. Let’s heed Christ’s call and be his light of faith and love for them.