

“Let Your Light Shine” based on Matt. 5:13-20 2/6/11

A week ago Friday, a number of us enjoyed a Christian Skate Night at Melody Gardens. There's always a lot going on there with the skating, the music, the games, and the food. And on this particular night there was a great crowd of children, youth and adults. Throughout the evening, as the kids took breaks from skating, they played some of the game machines that offered a wide variety of challenges. And these machines gave back bunches of tickets to those who did well at the games. With these tickets the kids could then purchase novelties of all kinds. This evening we noticed one particular novelty becoming very popular. It was a mouthpiece that had red and blue lights attached to it and when the lights were activated and the kids placed this between their teeth, you would see a beautiful array of these lights flashing as the skaters moved around the rink. I asked one of our kids: “Can you see the lights flashing when you have this in your mouth? The answer was: “Yes, when it's dark.” And for the rest of the evening those of us who were watching the skaters, enjoyed this light show at least as much as those who were shining these bright sparkling lights as they glided around the rink.

During the Advent season, just passed, one of our OT lessons from Isaiah brought forward the theme of light, encouraging us to “walk in the light of the Lord!” One of our Christmas carols--“Hark the Herald Angels Sing”--described Jesus, the newborn king, as bringing light and life to all. Today on the 5th Sunday of Epiphany we recognize again that this is the season of lights, when we celebrate Jesus being made known to the Gentile world represented by the wise men, who, guided by the light of the star, found the king they had been seeking.

Light is a part of the created order of things. God's created order. Scientists describe it in the language of science, but we also know that light goes beyond scientific description. --For light has a positive spiritual impact on us, which is a gift from God. We know in the winter time that a sunny day is always more welcome than a cloudy one. We know the feeling of life we get from it – the optimism, the hope, even the joy. So while the sun's rays give off light that we can explain with physics, something else is also happening, our spirits are being touched, filled and lifted up. And we, as God's people, want to reflect this optimism, hope, and joy into the world as well.

And so who are the light bringers in our world? Well, we want to recognize that light is a part of God's nature, and since we are all created in the image and likeness of God, light is also a part of our nature. We have been created with the capability to bring light into the world. But what's most helpful is to have those who can model this kind of behavior for us. Throughout my life there have been those who have brought light into my life. I remember in particular three elders--my sister's godmother, herself a musician, who brought us light and life by bringing new songs of faith into our home, which we either learned to sing or play on the piano. And then there was an elderly couple in a community where I served as church organist many years ago, who often invited me into their home and showered me with wonderful hospitality and encouragement, which was a witness to their faith in God. And there was an elder gentleman who was truly gentle, who was always searching the Scriptures and who taught me how to keep a prayer list. And there are more. But how about you? Who are those who bring light into your life by encouraging you, sharing their gifts, time, and talents with you, and by showing you how knowing Jesus can make a difference in your life?

And why is all of this so important? It's important because we live in a fallen world, and even though we have sunlight and spiritual light in the world, there is also much darkness in the world. And the darkness I'm talking about is the sin and evil that we unfortunately hear too much about on a daily basis. We know it close to home--in our personal lives, work life, community, and even our church life. And as we turn on the TV or get on the internet, we know it exists in the larger scope of things--the life of our nation and world. We need to let our light shine in order to help overcome the darkness. Here Jesus is a model for us, for in the Gospel of John we hear some of the most beautiful words of hope we could ever imagine: **"In the beginning was the Word (that is, Jesus), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."** After 2000 years the light of Jesus is still shining! And the power of darkness and evil has not overcome it and will not overcome it. This is Jesus' promise to us. But we also have a role to play in this. As God's people, it's in our DNA to shine the light that God has placed within us into the world.

But how can we shine our light in the world and keep on doing it? How can we continue to be a positive influence and encourage those around us? How can we continue to give of our time, talent and treasure for the good of others? How can we find the courage and even boldness to share what a difference it makes that Jesus is in our lives? We can do this and keep on doing it only by nurturing our spirit in God's lavish love for us. In order to give, we need to receive. In order to shine our light in the world, we need to take time to be filled with the Word of God and with the blessings of worship, and spiritual fellowship with other Christians. Ps. 1 gives us a clue about this. It says: **"Happy are those who...find joy in obeying the Law of the Lord. They study it day and night. They are like trees that grow beside a stream, that bear fruit at the right time, and whose leaves do not dry up. They succeed in everything they do."**

Remember you already have this light within you to shine into the world. Because in v. 16, Jesus doesn't say you need to create the light that you are to shine, or to go and find the light that you are to shine, but rather he says; **"Let your light shine."** You have it within you, Jesus says, so just let it be expressed. And in doing that, do you know what will happen? Other people will see what you are doing, and it will have an impact on them. They will recognize in you the living image of God and give glory and praise to God the Father who created you. So let your light shine! Amen!