

Straight from the "Hart"

Worship Service from July 18, 2021



Music Shine, Jesus, Shine

Act of Centering (..... means pause to visualize)

A story from Dr. James Brown in the book *Chicken Soup for the Soul*. Try to put yourself into the story. I invite you to get into a relaxed, receptive posture, close your eyes, and breathe slowly and deeply. It is late at night. The doctor is working late in his office studying charts and doing paperwork. His desk light could be seen through the window on the street..... At 2 in the morning, there is a knock on the door. It is a 16-year-old patient who had been out taking a walk, and thinking, and saw the light on. The doctor invites him in, and they talk. The young student mourned a recent relationship break up..... that his grades had slipped over the last couple years and he was in danger of not reaching his career goals.... that his parents fought a lot and he felt it was his fault..... he wasn't even sure if God loved him anymore.

The doctor listened and offered encouragement. He also put him in touch with some friends in the career this young man wanted. The doctor drove him home two hours later. A year later the student invited the doctor to his graduation. Inside the invitation, he told the doctor that the night he was walking by his office and saw the light on, he was extremely depressed and was contemplating ending his life. But he felt better after they talked, and he pursued those contacts in his field, and was accepted into the university. The doctor was grateful he had had his light on that night.....

But it wasn't just the light on his desk, it was the light of the Lord that made the difference that night. The Psalmist said "You (Lord) have the fountain of life. We are filled with light because you give us light. (Psalm 36:9) ... you keep the lamp of my life burning brightly. You are my God. You bring light into my darkness. (Psalm 18:28) As we reflect in silence today, who did you most relate to in the story -- the one needing the light, or the one giving the light? We've all been on both sides of that story at one time or another -- sometimes both at the same time. The author of the hymn we are about to hear was going through deep grief when he wrote about the wholeness God was still able to bring to his heart. Whichever side

of the story you are one today, let God speak to you -- giving you his encouraging light, or showing you who needs to see his encouraging light through you... to reach the wellness of soul that we all seek in the silence....

Special Music It is Well With My Soul

This series on the potential for happiness on the beatitudes has been attempting to show you how Christ's natural transformational process in the Christian brings wholeness and wellness to a person's spirit, and that we called on to share it, as we hear in our responsive reading today.

Responsive Reading (L - Lay Reader, C - Congregation)

L: This is the life-giving message we have heard from [Jesus] and now declare his words to you:

C: God is pure light. in him there is no trace of darkness.

L: If we claim that we share life with him, but keep walking in the realm of darkness, we're fooling ourselves and not living the truth. But if keep living in the pure light that surrounds him, we share unbroken fellowship with one another,

C: and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

L: Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God. At one time you knew nothing of God's mercy, because you hadn't received it yet, but now are drenched with it... you are a God's chosen treasure, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, set apart as God's devoted ones. He called you out of darkness to experience his marvelous light, and now he claims you as his very own special possession.

C: He did this so that that [we] would declare his glorious wonders throughout the world.

L: [Therefore], you must continue to work to make your new life of salvation [grow to full spiritual maturity] as you live in the holy awe of God -- which brings you trembling into his presence. For it is God who works in you to continually revitalize you, implanting within you the passion to please him and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

C: Live a cheerful life.

L: Do everything without complaining, grumbling or arguing, or division among yourselves. For then you will be seen as blameless and pure children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.

C: Then [we] will shine among them like stars in the universe, holding firmly to, and offering to everyone the words of eternal life.

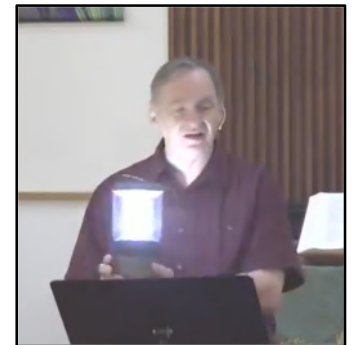
(1 John 1:5-7; 1 Peter 2:10,9; 2 Phil 2:12b-16a) (blended TPT, NIV, AMP)

Theme

The reading makes clear that God provides the light, but we have to be diligent to use it if we are going to shine out like stars to a dark world. I don't know the original source of this (now adapted) story. Their father had given his children everything they needed to make a journey, including a lantern to light their path. They started out with a light heart, joyful and happy as they walked along. There was just one problem. As odd as it might sound, the children weren't using their lantern. They carried it with them—but they didn't turn it on. Instead, they tried to force their way through the darkness.

It was comically sad to watch their progress. They agonized over their steps, stumbling forward, all the while failing to turn on the lantern that would have illuminated their path. They complained about the darkness, allowed discouragement and depression to grip their heart, and wondered if their father had forgotten them. Yet all the while, they failed to turn on the lantern he had provided. They carried it with them and talked about it with one another, but it didn't seem to occur to them that it would only light their path if they actually turned it on. The few brief times they turned it on, [Take the lantern and turn it on]. They did so out of ritual, not really using it to look at the path in which they were going.

If they had only let it, they'd have discovered that the lantern's light would have dispelled the darkness and shown them the truth of every pothole and tripping branch, and allowed them to avoid the cuts and the bruises physical, emotional, even spiritual -- caused by the dark path on which they were walking.



Light can't be anything other than what it is. It's bright; it dispels darkness; it enables people to see what they're doing. God is light, and as his ambassadors on earth, we shine even when we don't know it. We reflect God's very presence in the world. Our light always shines, the only way for others to not see it is to hide in an obscure place. If we do, the light is not extinguished, it is just rendered useless. But as good stewards of the light, we have many grace-filled opportunities to shine our light brightly every day and to share with all those we are in contact with. Our light reveals to those among our family, friends, neighbors and community what we believe by how we live our lives. We *are* the light of the world. So let us all be good stewards by letting our light shine in whatever way we have been gifted with, with our time, energy, talents or resources; and we will shine

all the more brightly if we keep in tune with the Word that lights our path. Let's prepare our hearts for prayer by singing

Prayer Music Thy Word

Pastoral Prayer

Lord, with all our senses, we experience your goodness and praise you for your presence. We are truly blessed to have you as our strength and refuge. When we cry for mercy, you listen. You deliver us from all our fears. We could not stand in your light if it were not for your forgiveness.

When we experience your grace, any reluctance to enter your presence is cleansed away. In your timing and your way, you save us from all our troubles. You protectively surround those who trust you. We serve you with reverence, and with our entire being we wait on you in certain hope, anticipating your wonderful works on our behalf, for your love is unfailing and your redemption brings wholeness. This is why we lift up those requests we share to your strong loving arms.

Intercession We continue to pray for * Randy and Margaret Melville's sister Joan Gofton; with a broken hip and compression fractures in spine. * For those working at the collapsed building in FL * For people to come to experience you as their personal Savior and Lord * for a young mother diagnosed with severe spinal cancer, having surgery next week and long hospitalization and recovery. * For Jan Martin's cousin Doris Thornton who is in terrible pain and will have back surgery on July 27 * And Lord, today we also add these: Mary Jo Bell requests prayer for a friend, Claire who has stage 4 cancer * Pat Schleh requests prayers for Sally – who is getting a knee replacement * and for Hannah who is dealing with blood clots in her legs (and surgery); that the medical teams will be at their best wisdom and skill and these ladies will receive a quick recovery * We also pray for the family and friends of James Steinacker who, years ago, was very active in this church and community. He passed away just as covid was starting and they had a local reception for him yesterday. * and for Sherrie Rice's young sister Jennifer (only 47) who was diagnosed with lymphocytic lymphoma -- more tests needed to know how to proceed with treatment * and then for Vivian Lemon, who was supposed to be at a memorial for her brother yesterday, but is instead with her son who had a heart attack, and her husband Gar who had a bad stroke the next night... and there are more that we hold in our thoughts and in our hearts -- We pray these requests with confidence that your will will be accomplished. We reveal our hearts to you, and stand in your grace, allowing us to pray with expectant anticipation the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray...**Lord's Prayer.**

In light of the light that God has shed on us, our next hymn asks the question -- what can we do beyond give thanks for God and his work through the people who have brought us this far, and for how his light will continue to shine now, and through his people in the future.

Music (vv 1,2,3) What Gift Can We Bring?

Bible Reading Intro and Reading (L - Lay Reader, C - Congregation)

As Christ concludes congratulating us who are willing to have our hearts transformed to his way of life, we become out of step with values that are opposed to God. Sometimes, we may receive flack for it. As Mark Twain put it: "Few things are harder to put up with than the annoyance of a good example."

Jesus calls us to be that example anyway. He elaborates what that example looks like through the rest of his Sermon on the Mount by descriptions of avoiding judgmental anger, making peace, fulfilling vows and promises, turning the other cheek, loving and praying for enemies. In these ways and more, Christ-followers differ from others, and by being different, they will be salt and light to a bitter, decaying, dark world. Today,

L: He [continues] to teach....,

C: Our lives are like salt among the people.

L: But if you, like salt, become bland, how can your 'saltiness' be restored? Flavorless salt is good for nothing and will be thrown out and trampled on by others.

C: Our lives light up the world.

L: For how can you hide a city that stands on a hilltop? And who would light a lamp and then hide it in an obscure place? Instead, it's placed where everyone in the house can benefit from its light. So don't hide your light! Let it shine brightly before others, so that your commendable works will shine as light upon them,

C: and then they will give their praise to [our] Father in heaven.

(Matthew 5:2, 13-16 (TPT))

Sermon Light Salt is Good

Salt cannot be not salty any more than a mule can give birth. It just doesn't happen. The nature of salt and light is to impact what it touches. And it is in the nature of Jesus' followers to live out this transformation that Christ's presence works in our hearts.

Salt and light -- impact

Two temptations may come our way. One is to avoid being light and salt. After all, the fate of the light and salty prophets was not usually very pleasant - they were ignored, mocked, imprisoned and killed by their *own* people, much less society in general. So, we hide our nature. To use Jesus' words, we hide it in an obscure place (or as many translations put it simply, we put it "under a bowl" and we hope no one will notice that we are guided by different values.

Temptations

* **Avoidance**

* **Non-essential ways**

The other temptation is to be uniquely light salt, but in non-essential ways. When you put salt on something, it tastes no different than if you hadn't salted it at all. John Ortberg's book, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, describes this kind of difference as "boundary markers" or "identity markers". For you who are old enough, if I mention the word, hippie, does something come to mind? or yuppie, something come to mind? Beach bum? or valley girl? stoner? biker? Each of you comes up with a fairly common image, and action, and vocabulary and speech patterns -- maybe even attitudes with them as well -- with each of these labels and that would be very similar to everyone else's description in the room with some variety, but not much -- because groups came to be known by certain identifiers that were common in their particular sub-culture. That is not to say everyone in that sub-culture perfectly conformed to those boundary markers that made them and their group different from others -- they still were and are individuals.

The same is true of faith. In Bible days, religious leaders fought with Jesus over circumcision, and diet, and Sabbath laws, and with whom you associated (just to name a *few*). These hot topics were passionately debated because, for them, they were at the core of what identified and distinguished them from all the other people in the world -- it is what made them them, as God's faithful people.

Jesus, on the other hand, believed that when people heard the word "Christian" the stereotypical imagination of action, speech patterns, and attitude should reflect -- not so much all those traditional practices, but primarily -- how they loved each other like no other group of people loved each other on all the earth. (John 13:35)

The Christian's identity marker is love

Superficial faith boundary and identity markers are not a problem as long as they don't hinder or become a substitute for the deeper spiritual differences that Jesus is working out in our hearts and wants us to be known for (know for how we love each other). As one person explained to Ortberg -- "Christians are supposed to be

different from people in the world by being more loving and more gentle -- and everybody knows we are not, but don't we have to do *something* to show we're different?" In other words, since we can't be holy, shouldn't we at least be weird? Got to be different somehow!

We need to press on for the unique markers that are deep within, the ones that really mean something, the spiritual markers that make us act in love for the transformation of the world. Jesus has been talking about how blessed, how privileged, how happy, how whole -- are those who allow him to transform their hearts (See Matthew 5:3-12), and it is this natural outworking of this transformation that makes us different. We will know who we uniquely are by our love, by our peacemaking, by our quest for authentic purity, by what we hunger and thirst after, by our meekness and our humility...

What it means to be salt and light today may play out differently for each of our specific lives, because we all have different backgrounds, and personalities and gifts and talents and strengths and weaknesses -- but there are some general common traits that each of us should consider how it applies uniquely to us.

Salt of the earth

Salt is connected with **purification**, cleansing from infection and contamination. Christians seek a pure commitment (a clear priority) of Christ's life and ways guiding their life as opposed to the relativism and selfish interest that is the general rule of our world. Being salt helps us mutually, purely, openly and honestly lay before God all our successes and all of our failures, our joys and sufferings, allowing him to accept and forgive and cleanse us, helping us hone and re-hone our focus and priority on him and his will for us.

Closely related, salt is connected with **preservation**. Salt keeps things from going bad. Throughout history the Christian Church, when it is at its best, has been known for its social reforms that increase and preserve the quality of life for many people. Hospitals (there is a reason many of them have biblical references in their names), schools, child labor laws, abolishing slavery, helping people in need -- many of life's challenging circumstances have found at least some relief by people who were inspired by their faith to move and act on behalf of those in need.

As a very early Christian leader said, "It is our care for the helpless, our practice of loving kindness, that *brands* us in the eyes of our opponents." (Tertullian) It was their deep love of Christ and others that made them a unique people in a harsh world.

Salt also gives **flavor**. Christians are sometimes considered boring, stale, party-poopers -- anything but flavorful. Robert Louis Stevenson once journaled as if it were an extraordinary experience when he wrote this: "I have been to church today and am not depressed!"

A contractor who met with a pastor to give an estimate on air conditioning for the sanctuary. He carefully measured the room and seating capacity and noted average attendance and began working up calculations. Suddenly, he ripped up the paper and started over. "What's wrong?" asked the pastor. He replied, "I was calculating for a theater, not a church." "If the dimensions are the same, what difference does that make?" asked the pastor. "In a theater, the excitement in the people who are watching the actors on the stage or screen elicits biological changes -- increased heart rate and blood pressure that generate additional body heat. We have to take that into account. But in the church, none of that is relevant." That's scary isn't it?

I'm not sure that kind of excitement level is necessarily an essential identity marker of Christianity, but Christ wasn't hung on a cross because the people thought he was irrelevant, and boring, and depressing. He certainly flavored our world, and hopefully, there is something about our lives that draws people toward (and not pushes them away from) Christ.

Salt purifies, salt preserves, salt flavors, and finally, Salt makes us **thirsty**. Many are attracted to people of faith just as many people were attracted to Christ.

We don't always accomplish that. One priest was impressed when he saw Robert Schuller's church joyfully greeting other worshipers. He felt his stuffy church could use a bit of friendliness. Therefore he announced that the following Sunday, they were going to initiate this friendship custom of standing and greeting each other. When the service ended, one person turned around, offered his hand and said, "Good morning." She replied with shocked indignity, "I beg your pardon, that friendship stuff doesn't start until next week." They say you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make them drink and that is true, but you can be a salt lick on the way to the stream, right? Christians can do that for people, by their example, by the way they live, it will encourage others to become thirsty and want to drink the living waters of Christ. We are salt.

We are also light. Jesus declares that Christianity is meant to be seen -- not in a show-off-y way, or a judgmental way, but its values are visible in the way that * we treat employees who wait on us?

Light of the World

hopefully. * in the way we play a game (with sportsmanship), * by the way we drive our car, (ooo – got some “oos” on that one) * in the daily language we use, * in our attitudes. We are a Christian in the work place, in the school place, in the recreation places, the social places, the eating places, and living places (in our homes) just as much as we are in this room, or watching from home at this room. Jesus did not say "You are the light of the church", he said, "You are the light of the world".

The goal is positive and beneficial impact as we lose ourselves in Christ's mission. In fact, Jesus says it is only then that we will truly find ourselves and find eternal life. (See John 12:24-26) We still have no control over how people respond to us. God never forces himself on others, and so we cant (shouldn't try) to force them to him either. But he continually offers, and we off people the opportunity to choose or reject him just as we were given that choice, and really are given that choice every day. As we wake up, who am I going to serve today?

If we are doing it right, people will taste the effect and see the illumination of Christianity, and then they will praise and receive, or reject (not us, but) God. Remember, Jesus said, “people will see our deeds and (recognize God) praise God in heaven”. He said that in this same sermon -- everything points to him, whether it is praise or whether it is scorn. Everything points to him.

Points to God

Imagine a scenario where a fast-food employee walks by and salts the fries. Another doesn't realize they had salted, and so they come by and salt it again, and a minute later the manager walks by and not seeing the first two salt, salts it a third time. It is the source of that phrase “a bit of fries with my salt”. If you can literally taste the salt as salt on your food, (at least in my opinion), that's too much salt -- it shouldn't be drawing attention to its own presence. People should say "that's a great steak" not "that's a great brand of salt".

In the same way, when we enter a dark room, we do not turn on the light to stare at the bulb -- in fact, in many places, home especially, we put shades over them so we can't look at the bulb; because bulb staring is not good for us. (There are a lot of ramifications for that alone -- such as keep your eyes on Jesus and not on each other (if we are all light bulbs). We turn on the light to see the lightened room. People shouldn't think, "Boy that's a great bulb." but "Now I won't stub my toe because I can see the way." People may appreciate the salt and the bulb, but the real credit is given to God and perhaps they may even begin a relationship with him because of what they see in our saltiness and our light.

Sometimes we may wonder how much impact we can make. One dawn, a man decided to take a stroll along the beach. The receding tide had stranded masses of star fish as far as the eye could see. He noticed a young boy ahead of him picking them up and flinging them out into the sea. The man caught up with him and asked what he was doing. "The stranded starfish will die if left out for the full heat of the morning sun." The man protested, "But the beach goes on for miles, and there are millions of them, how can you make any significant difference?" The boy looked at the starfish he was still holding in his hand. "It makes a difference to this one" and he tossed in back into the sea of life-giving water. And who know how far that work may spread? Maybe the old man started to helping, and many some others saw them and started helping as well, doubling, tripling the rescue effort, maybe more... as more and more jump in.

One person can affect another, who then affects another, and then another, and so forth and so on... the light just keeps on penetrating, and penetrating, and penetrating. There is a practical benefit too – as we walk the paths of this dark world. Quoting a friend, "If you light a lamp for someone else, it also brightens your own path." May we, God's salt and light, continue to shake and spread until nothing remains stale, and nothing remains dark.

Prayer Let's pray, Lord, you bring us together to form a distinctive group of people -- your people. We are not made distinctive by *any superficial* group dynamic, but as each of us brings our individual God-given gifts and skills and personalities to you -- we join the long line of your people that have preceded us, and the long line of people that will follow us. People who make a difference in your name just by being yours and letting your transformation of our hearts work its way out in flavorful, enlightened living.

Lord remind us, that, yes, you bless us and call us fortunate and happy, and complete and whole as you transform us. But you also make it clear that, just as in the Old Testament, you blessed Abraham so that he could become God's nation and that nation would be a blessing to the world, that we too, have been blessed not to selfishly hoard our blessings to ourselves, but to become a blessing to others for your name's sake, and this is what we desire to do as you empower us and go before us, creating the opportunities for us to make a difference in your world, in Jesus name, Amen.

This next old hymn is printed in your bulletin. It is a prayer – but we will sing it as it was meant to be sung -- with positive, exciting joy as we seek to let God make us a blessing for others.

Music Make Me a Blessing

Out in the highways and byways of life,
Many are weary and sad;
Carry the sunshine where darkness is rife,
Making the sorrowing glad.

Refrain

Make me a blessing, Make me a blessing.
Out of my life may Jesus shine;
Make me a blessing, O Savior, I pray.
Make me a blessing to someone today.

Tell the sweet story of Christ and his love,
Tell of his pow'r to forgive;
Others will trust him if only you prove
True, ev'ry moment you live.

Refrain

Give as 'twas given to you in your need,
Love as the Master loved you;
Be to the helpless a helper indeed,
Unto your mission be true.

Refrain

Of course, we realize none of this will happen with any effectiveness if God's Spirit does not enfold us, (surround) us with his love, transforming our cooperative hearts, filling us with his presence, nourishing us in our spirits and making us whole as we offer our hearts and lives to him.

Music (v 1, No Ref, v 2, Ref) Spirit Song

Blessing And we know he will feed us because everything that is good comes from God's hand. He fills your minds and hearts with his love. Love him above all things. Desire to please him. Receive the joy he has prepared for you. Amen.

Post Service Music