

“Let Your Light Shine”

Matthew 5:13-20

The season of Epiphany is often symbolized by light. Beginning with the coming of the Wise Men, who followed the light of the Star of the East; and culminating in a few weeks when we celebrate the Transfiguration of our Lord -- where Peter, James, and John witness the glory of God – where the brilliance of the Lord’s face shone like the sun and His white garment became as bright as a flash of lightning and was too much for the disciples to look at.

But in between the appearance of the Bethlehem Star and Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration, we see a different kind of light. Jesus comes preaching and teaching that He is the Light of the world. He has come to shine His light into the darkness and void of our sinful hearts -- so that where His Light shines, darkness disappears. And when the light of Christ shines in your heart, as Jesus says, “You are the light of the world.”

The Epiphany Season is about Christ our Lord being revealed to us. That is what an Epiphany is – a revealing of something that was not seen before. The season of Epiphany is really a season of change. When Christ revealed Himself to the world, the world changed. When Christ revealed Himself to you, you changed.

When you were brought to the waters of Holy Baptism, you left as a different person. Christianity is not a lifestyle. It is life. It is the difference between light and darkness. It is the difference between life and death.

The metaphors of salt and light that Jesus uses are meant to send the same message. If salt has lost its saltiness, it is not salt. Have you ever had salt that is not salty? Of course not. Either something is salt or it is not salt.

Likewise, unless you are living in a black hole in space, if light is not shining, it is not light. The more light is present, the more darkness disappears. If the light of Christ is in you, the light of Christ must be visible. As children, we all grew up singing, "This little Gospel light of mine" I'm going to let it shine.

As a kid, I always thought of it as a somewhat marginal, at best, song. It wasn't my favorite, partly because the lyrics didn't make any sense to me. The line "hide it under a bushel, no. I'm going to let it shine." I thought we were singing, "Hide it under a bush, oh no, I'm going to let it shine." And, I can remember as a kid at Martin Luther School sitting in chapel thinking, "why a bush?" I could think of so many objects that would dim the lights better than a bush.

I was at Seminary before I was enlightened that this was a bushel basket being described in the song. After that, the song made much more sense to me. No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bowl or a basket. You can't see the light, and in time, it will get snuffed out.

The point Jesus is making is that if you claim to be a child of God filled with the light of Christ, yet your words and actions in this life are full of darkness, how can light and darkness be present simultaneously. Light makes darkness disappear. If darkness is present, it means that light is absent.

As Jesus says, from the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The words that you use either demonstrate the presence of light or the lack of light within you. It is not only in your words and in your confession of faith, but it is also in your deeds, in your good works that the light of Christ is seen in this world.

In last week's Old Testament reading we heard the words of the prophet Micah concerning what God desires from us. He said, "Do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God." It is in actions, it is in what we do, that our faith manifests itself. This is what we do in response to the light of Christ – the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation we have received. The crucified and risen Savior has brought light to a world where there was only darkness.

Our response to this is a call to action. Last week, I asked you to think of that one person you know who has wasted years of their life vainly chasing after the joys and pleasures this world offers and never finding satisfaction. Again pray for that person. Christ died for that person.

This week, I want you to think of that person (or persons) who went out of their way to make sure you were filled with the light of Christ. Think of that person who, through

their action, in the way they lived their life, through their words, through their life in the church, the light of Christ shined forth from them to you. And their words and their work brought you to know that what we have right here is important.

Think of that person who shined the light of Christ into your dark world and how much that has meant to you. Now think of someone sitting in darkness for whom you can be the one shining that light of Christ. This is the work in the kingdom God has given us.

And why do we do it? So that we might be praised for what good people we are? No. Jesus says, “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” Do not hide that light under the proverbial bowl or basket – or even under a bush. Let your light shine.

When we are blessed to have a Baptism, and the child of God is washed clean of all his or her sin, I give them, or the sponsors who are representing them, a lit candle, and I say, “Live always by the light of Christ.”

This is an action-oriented command. The words that you speak; the things that you do (or refrain from doing) demonstrate the light of Christ in your life. As His ambassadors, “you are the light of the world...Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” Amen.