

“You are the Light of the World”

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 two 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 utter darkness 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, if light is not shining, it is not light. And I don't want to hear from any of you who hold degrees in Physics about how light behaves in a Black Hole. We don't do "Black Hole Theology" and we don't do "Desert Island Theology" (If I'm on a desert island and my only companion is my volleyball "Wilson," I can't go to church or take communion. But I pray and believe and have confidence that I am a faithful child of God. If that works on a desert island, why is that not also true here in Quincy?)

The Word of God speaks to people who are in the world. And Jesus says, "Do this in remembrance of Me." And if the claim is made that they believe, it begs the question, "What do you believe in?" If you believe that your life is a gift from God, and if you believe that God sent His Son to suffer and die to take away the burden of your sin and free you from an eternity of hell, and if you believe that Christ rose from the grave opening the path to eternal life for you, I find it hard to believe that yearning to hear that message

and giving thanks for that Good News is not a higher priority.

That is not how anyone conducts themselves in any other walk of life. It would be like someone claiming to be genuine, avid, lifelong Kansas City Chiefs fan, but having no interest in watching the Super Bowl last week. That is not normal behavior. 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 song, at best. 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, as I child, I remember 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 you dismiss the will of God and your words and actions in this life are full of darkness – are a spiritual Black Hole – that light will not be seen. Even if light is there, it will be as if it isn’t. That is what happens in Black Holes.

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. Last week I spoke of the cost of discipleship and what it is that God desires from us: as the prophet Micah 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, salvation. 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. 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, 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.

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 don't do) 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.