

Be the Light! **One Great Hour of Sharing**

Sermon materials provided by UCC One Great Hour of Sharing 'Be the Light!' campaign

Happy Spring everyone! We are now in a season when light is more plentiful than darkness, even if, at this moment, it is only by a few minutes. But, whenever and however, light is powerful. Light has a noticeable effect; not just on plants awakening, but also on me (and maybe you). On dark, cloudy, rainy days, I struggle to wake up and get out of bed. And the rest of day drags; I'm a lump on the couch, and I have fog in my brain. But on sunny, light-filled days, I'm up with the sun, full of vim and vinegar, and ready to take on the world, (or at least enjoy the day). Maybe you notice that too.

I wonder if that is what Jesus had in mind as he opened the Sermon on the Mount. We know the words so well, but when Jesus declared 'blessed are you...' it was eye-opening. Unlike the view the world held out, Jesus announced that those whom the world dismisses, the people who are burdened in mind, body, and spirit, are actually blessed!

Despite their situation or condition, they already have God's favor. And maybe, it is because of their pain and the suffering they experience they actually draw closer to God, and experience his grace and favor. Jesus does not glorify pain; rather, he proclaims that these are first in God's heart. God is there, with love and compassion; to help and heal—as a gift, no conditions, and no strings. They are part of God's family, God's Reign, and God's Kingdom. God's Kingdom is more than a place or future destination—it is a relationship with a loving and just God, a God of light and life.

Jesus does not sugar-coat the reality of suffering or oppression. But he does declare that suffering is not the end of the story. God is not blind, nor does he close his eyes. God sees the burdened and hears their cries; God moves to alleviate their pain, both in the short run and the long haul. God's reign of love and healing is already happening—bringing life out of death, joy out of sorrow, hope out of despair. Jesus cautions us that the response to God's blessing is not one of passivity. He makes clear that God's children are blessed; and so they are to be a blessing to and for others; those who receive, are to give back.

In other words, God's reign is not a spectator sport; the faithful do not have the option to close their eyes, or to sit back and watch events unfold. They are invited and challenged to *be* something and to *do* something. Followers of Jesus are transformed—from the inside out—as they receive the gifts of God's grace, and are called to gift others with love, compassion, and generosity.

Jesus' entire ministry is active—teaching, preaching, healing, and connecting. Jesus sets the standard for "Kingdom-living"—where love, unity, and harmony are the benchmarks for community life. Jesus invites us all to be active—doing what we can to embody compassion; to stand up for equity and fairness; to care for those in need without seeking reward or notoriety. Jesus teaches his disciples—and us—that God's reign is a present reality and a future hope.

For Jesus, God's reign is about forming communities of diverse people, living as siblings, caring for each other and the created order, and building communities of justice and love where all are fed, sheltered, healed, and safe. Jesus declares that God's reign is happening right now, even as we wait for its fulfillment.

Jesus invites his listeners—and us—to fully embrace the gift and grace God offers and be the gift that keeps on giving, the light that keeps on shining. Many of the ordinary people listening to Jesus that day understood and dedicated themselves to the challenge.

Jesus assures us that we are what God intends: we are God’s children; we are open-hearted, generous, and compassionate. By fully living into our identity as children of God, we spread God-colors throughout the world, bearing light, hope, and love to a desperate and dying world.

Have you ever seen a suncatcher? Suncatchers are ornaments made of glass, crystal, or some translucent material. Usually hung in a window or outdoors, they spin to reflect and filter light, casting color in the area surrounding them—hues of blue, red, green, purple, and yellow—a limitless array of colors and patterns that symbolize warmth, love, compassion, generosity, and hospitality. Suncatchers bear and spread color—just as our good deeds bear light and send color into the world.

That is the image Jesus is calling us to. As Eugene Petersen states in the Message “Let me tell you why you are here. You’re here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. ... You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. ... Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.”

Jesus words here, in the Beatitudes, and elsewhere, in fact the whole of the Bible, lets us know that communities of justice, love, compassion, and generosity are desired by God and are possible—here and now. Jesus lets us know that God is *already* transforming and loving the world, *already* empowering God’s people to be all they can be—lights bringing God-colors to every corner of creation.

So let us live believing and trusting God that we are and can make a difference. In Christ, through his Spirit, we already have everything we need to be light-bearers. We need only to shine. So...

Be light—in your home, church, and community— support a food pantry; visit those who are sick or bereaved; pick up trash around your neighborhood; collect clothing for the poor; gather signatures for petitions about important issues; call your representatives—let the need beckon you to action.

Be light—in the world, by supporting larger initiatives that can tackle issues out of reach for a small gathering. By making a generous contribution to One Great Hour of Sharing, we support those doing ministry throughout the United States and across the globe—bringing hope and help, compassion and love, to places we may never visit and people we may never meet.

Be the light! For the sake of sisters and brothers who have renewed hope because you care enough to shine.

Be the light! So that women and men around the world can find their way and know that there is a path forward.

Be the light! Sharing God-colors with all you encounter! Follow in the footsteps of The Light of the World!

Shine brightly!

Amen!