

**“On Being Light Bearers”**  
**Matthew 5: 14-16**  
**by Rev. David J. Wood**  
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**Matthew 5: 14-16**

‘You are the light of the world.

A city built on a hill cannot be hidden.

No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket,  
but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.

In the same way, let your light shine before others,  
so that they may see your good works  
and give glory to your Father in heaven.

It was a beautiful day at Fenway Park on August 8, 1982. Tom Keane and his two sons, Jonathan and Matthew had driven in to Boston from their home in New Hampshire to watch the Red Sox take on the Chicago White Sox. They had great seats right along the 1st base line.

The game was tied at 2-2 in the 4th inning when John Stapleton stepped into the batters box for the Red Sox. He went for the 1st pitch. But was late with his swing. He fouled it off...the ball rocketed past the Red Sox dugout down the first base line and into the stands.

No one was sure where the ball had gone. For a split second Tom Keane thought it had ricocheted off the wall the Red Sox dugout...until he heard a scream. He turned to see that his 4 year old son Jonathan had suffered the full impact of the foul ball and was bleeding from his head.

The boy collapsed. For an instant everyone froze.

From the dugout, the Red Sox star, Jim Rice, had seen the whole thing unfold. In a flash, Rice sprinted from the dugout, leapt over the railing and into the crowd. He quickly corralled the bleeding child in his arms and carried him back to the dugout.

It had all unfolded in less than a minute. Rice laid the boy out on the dugout floor where team doctors were waiting. Soon after the EMTs arrived, and eventually the boy was taken to the hospital. He survived and made a full recovery. Doctors later said that if Rice hadn't acted so quickly, that the outcome would have been very different.

Later Rice quietly, with no fanfare, paid the family's hospital bill.

Sometimes the light shines and you can't miss it. We all know it when we see it. That's what God looks like.

That spontaneous act by Jim Rice was one of those moments. The selfless act, without forethought, without regard to what might be considered appropriate or beyond his sphere of responsibility.

It was a brilliant moment...out in the open for all to see and comprehend...although, Rice was not in any sense performing for the crowd...he simply saw what needed to be done and did it. In a world where darkness looms large, the need is great for such deeds.

You are the light of the world...a city on a hill...a lamp on a lampstand...it's a startling claim:

Not the Torah...Not the Temple...Not the Holy City Jerusalem

You...YOU (collectively) are the light of the world.

We should be startled....through YOU....your deeds GOD's light shines...  
you are the bearers of the light of God...

**What does the light look like?**

**What form does it take?**

**Not about belief, doctrine, propositions...**

not about a nation,

It's about a people who live a particular way of life...

Love generously;

hope vigorously

Speak truthfully.

Forgive extravagantly

Being merciful, humble, makers of peace,

About hungering and thirsting for justice...

suffering for what is right,

Mourning with and for those who suffer

Turning the other cheek,

Loving your enemies,

feeding the hungry and caring for the sick...

not being lovers of money or anxious about life...

**When we know so much about what is happening in the world...it is hard. We know so much and feel like we can do so little...we cannot help but feel like spectators, bystanders...wringing our hands but not extending our hands...**

We suffer from an excess of awareness and a deficit of direct involvement. Without intending to, we become well-informed bystanders.

All of which makes our actual deeds all the more vital.

**Amanda Gorman,**

National Youth Poet Laureate..from her poem, *The Hill We Climb*, that she read at President Biden's Inauguration:

STARTS OUT: When day comes we ask ourselves,  
where can we find light in this never-ending shade?

CONCLUDES: When day comes we step out of the shade,  
afame and unafraid,  
the new dawn blooms as we free it.  
For there is always light,  
if only we're brave enough to see it.  
If only we're brave enough to be it.

I cannot read this text without recalling the words of Martin Luther King, Jr, in his Letter from a Birmingham Jail" written in 1963 to ministers and congregations of his day....

So here we are moving toward the exit of the twentieth century with a religious community largely adjusted to the status quo, standing as a tail-light behind other community agencies rather than a headlight leading [the world] to higher levels of justice."

The church as a headlight is clearly what Jesus had in mind.

Several years ago, I visited the Lighthouse on Seguin Island – which sits about 2 1/2 miles from the mouth of the Kennebec River.

2nd oldest of Maine's lighthouses. What I remember most about that visit was learning about the lens that sits atop that lighthouse. It has a Fresnel Lens: All of 9feet tall and 5 ft wide, containing 242 prisms. It was installed in 1857.

Before the Fresnel Lens, the light from lighthouses could only be visible from a distance of 2 miles...created more wrecks than anything else. By the time ships saw it, it was too late.

The fresnel lens, invented by Augustin Fresnel in France in the 1820's changed everything. Rather than placing a light source in front of a reflective mirror, Fresnel figured out a way to place the light source behind a lens that captured and refracted the light. The result was that the light was visible for 20 miles. All this from a single light source: a single lamp originally fueled by kerosene. In the 1950's replaced by a single 1,000 Watt bulb.

The fresnel lens was known as "the invention that saved a million ships."  
Our deeds do not create the light as much as they refract God's light to the world.

It is the deeds, the good works, that make visible God's light to the world.  
However, without the lens of our deeds, God's light remains hidden.

It is not our boast...but our burden...it does not set us apart or above...it situates us in the midst of this world to be bearers of light...amidst every darkness we encounter.

There are stories we need to remember...to call us out of the shadows...of what happens when a people dare to believe they are what Jesus says they are...

Let me tell you a story about one place...about one pastor and his church.

The pastor is Christian Fuhrer. The congregation is St. Nicholas Church...

The place is Leipzig, E. Germany. The time year is 1982.

Under the existing communist regime, cathedrals like St. Nicholas were allowed to stay open by they were oppressed and drained of life and significance.

In 1982, Christian Fuhrer began a Monday night prayer meeting.

He called it "Prayers for Peace."

A handfull of people gathered in the cavernous sanctuary.

They lit a single candle.

Read from the Beatitudes...and offered prayers for peace...for the world.

**"Blessed are the meek,** for they shall inherit the earth.

**Blessed are those who mourn,** for they shall be comforted

**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst** for righteousness, for they shall be filled.

**Blessed are the peacemakers,** for they shall be called children of God...

For years...every Monday night, week in and week out, they met...lit candles...read Scripture...shared their lives and prayed. By 1988 the weekly gathering had grown—by word of mouth— to 600 people. Efforts by the Stazi, the E. German police, to violently intimidate and threaten those who dared to gather failed.

By September, 1989...the gathering had swelled to 4,000.

On Monday, October 9, 1989, it was the 40th anniversary of the Communist takeover, a 1,000 Stazi police descended on the gathering...

outside the full church, another 70k people gathered with candles in a vigil for peace and non-violence. The police dispersed.

Throughout October, those numbers grew from 70k to 120k, to 1/2 Mill...to more than 1M. Just days later, on November 9, 1989 the Berlin Wall Fell...

One communist leader confessed, "The Communist regime prepared for everything except candles and prayers."

Later that month, a banner was unfurled in the center of Leipzig: "We Thank You Church."

There are moments in time when the world becomes aligned with a goodness, a truth, a beauty that feels ideal and real all at the same time.

Where the real and the ideal resonate...when the world feels, a least for a moment in time, redeemed...aligned with the truth...

Something sacred breaks through and breaks up our assumptions about reality...

about what is true.

about what is possible.

This light is never in danger of going out...of being extinguished.

But it can be hidden.

Instead of refracting the light for the world...we protect it, squander it on ourselves...

As you move through the world of your daily life...your beliefs might be shakey...your doubts abiding.....but your deeds can be strong and true and light bearing!

To you...to me...to us...Jesus makes the startling claim:  
You are the light of the world. Amen.