

Light-Bearers to the World

Matthew 5:14-16; Luke 12:48b

November 10, 2024 – Center Harbor Congregational Church, United Church of Christ

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We love this passage from Matthew, don't we? "You are the light of the world. A city that is built on a hill cannot be hid.... Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to God in heaven." It is such a beautiful image! It makes me think of this church at Christmastime, with fairy lights around our door and a spotlight on our steeple, luminaries lining the road, the lights of the sanctuary shining, and the first strains of "O Come, All Ye Faithful" ringing out into the night. My heart bursts with love when I picture all that light shining out into the darkness.

Or, I remember the joy I heard last week, when one of our seven-year-old visitors (Jerry) realized that he was already friends with our other seven-year-old visitor (Olivia). They both just happened to end up here on the same day and trotted off happily to Sunday School together. The light of God, shining right here in our sanctuary, and all we had to do was provide the space for the light to shine.

Or I think of our Little Free Pantry and the quiet, shy "thank yous" I have received since we put it up – from people who are embarrassed to need this help, yet so grateful to receive it. Or the people who think of this church as the place where they receive a hot meal on Tuesday nights from the soup kitchen. We feed hungry neighbors every single week. Let your light shine, so that others may see it and give glory to God in heaven.

I hear about selfless acts of love that you have done quietly for folks in need in our congregation – a ride to the hospital in the middle of the night, a meal for someone who is recovering from surgery. You don't advertise these gifts, and you probably think that even I don't hear about them, but I do. We are good at loving one another, even loving sacrificially, and we welcome everyone who needs us.

We are known as a praying church, so even people who have never worshiped here still ask for our prayers. When we worship outdoors in the summer and at Christmas and Easter, our neighbors come, even if they wouldn't come into our sanctuary. Our light is kindled in here, but it shines "out there," to folks we don't even know, because a church that is built on a hill cannot be hid.

I am not going to try to mention all the ways our light shines, because I couldn't possibly do it. I would surely leave out something – many things! But you know it. You feel it. We are called to it. Jesus said, "You are the light of the world. Let your light shine."

But wait! How did WE get to be the light of the world? Didn't Jesus say in the Gospel of John that HE is the light of the world? He is! That is a particularly important reminder for us this week, when we have just gone through a national election, no matter whether you are celebrating the results or you are upset with the outcome. The light that shines here in this church and in our lives is a heavenly light. It doesn't come from Concord or from Washington and it doesn't come from within us. It comes from God. It is a good thing that we don't have to come up with enough light for the whole world just from our own resources, isn't it? No, we come here every week to fill up with God's love and light, so that we can share it with others. Then we come back the next week and top off our tank again. More love. More light. More shining out into a world that needs us all the more.

Every week we sing "This Little Light of Mine, I'm Gonna Let It Shine." It is a happy, feel-good way to end the service, and a reminder to share what we have received. But this morning, I am feeling not just the joy of sharing the light of God, but also the responsibility of carrying that light out into the world. Especially when I remember our passage from Luke this morning. Jesus said, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked."

That is a daunting reminder to me. I have a warm, solid home, even warm enough and solid enough to see me through a New England winter. I have plenty to eat. I have enough of every THING that matters. I also have a loving family. I live in a

beautiful corner of God's Creation. I have good work to do. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded. Jesus was talking to me. He expects a lot of me – of all of us.

And then I read the second half of this verse – from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked – and I realize that I have been entrusted with so much more than a warm home and a loving family and enough to eat. I have been entrusted with the light of God. What gift could be greater than that? And Jesus expects – even requires – me to be a steward of the light, to keep it lit, to carry it out into the world. I am a light-bearer to the world. So are you. So are we all. What an awesome responsibility!

You know some of what that requires of us. Jesus told us – feed hungry people, give thirsty people something to drink, gather clothes for people who need them, visit people who are lonely or sick or in prison, welcome strangers, set free those who are oppressed. We can't shirk those responsibilities. And we have to organize ourselves to do that work, to share the light of God in these ways. And so, we do. We have a Mission Board that guides our gifts each month to respond to these needs. We do this work not just through our mission gifts but through our worship and through the way we use our building for the benefit of our community. We aren't here just to meet our own spiritual needs, though I hope we do that, too. No, we are here because – as a church – we have been entrusted with the light of God and it is our sacred obligation to share that light with the world.

Now, you know that this is stewardship season. Your pledge card has already landed in your mail box, or it will arrive very soon. We will dedicate our pledges for 2025 in the worship service next week, so I hope you will give prayerful consideration in the next few days to how you can support God's work through the ministries of this church in the coming year. And I hope, as you think about your pledge, you will remember that everything we do here – EVERYTHING – is about sharing the light of God, because Jesus asked us to do this, charged us to do it, and he holds us accountable for the way we share God's light in the world. Without our daily actions we can't do this sacred work together. And without our gifts, the lights here would literally go out.

So, the Stewardship Committee has asked each of us to consider whether we can see ourselves "stepping up" in the coming year. If you are a regular giver but not a pledger, can you see your way clear to stepping up to make a pledge? It would help the church a lot in our planning. A pledge is not a legal obligation, but a statement of intention, and if your circumstances change, we will understand. Or, if you are already a pledger, can you see yourself "stepping up" in the level of your giving? Dave and I will increase our pledge for 2025 by 5%, for the time that we will be here, because we want the light of God to continue to shine here for many, many years to come. Will you join us?

Every gift is important and worthy of praise, and if we all give what we can, if we give as we feel called to give, if we give at a level that brings us joy, then God will bless our gifts and multiply them to meet the need. So, I thank you for all the ways you give to our shared ministry here. With your gift, and mine, and the next person's and the next, we will reflect the light of God from this church out into our community. And everyone who sees what we do here, everyone who receives food from our little pantry or whose heart is healed in worship or through prayer, everyone who knows anything about this little church will be blessed by that light, and they will give glory – not to us – but to God.

We are the bearers of the light of God to Center Harbor and to the world. It is an awesome responsibility, and one we cannot set aside. So let our light shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Amen