

Share the Light
Matthew 5:14-16
March 10, 2024 – Center Harbor Congregational Church, UCC
Rev. Dr. Cathryn Turrentine

I love this morning's scripture. It's from the Sermon on the Mount, at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, as Matthew tells it. Steve read it well, but I want to read it again, because it is just so beautiful: "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. People do not light a lamp and put it under a bushel basket; rather, they put it on a lamp stand 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." This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.

We have heard this scripture so often that we know it, perhaps by heart, and I wonder if it is almost too familiar, as though it has nothing left to teach us. When that happens to me, I try reading the same passage from a different version of the Bible, so that I can hear it with fresh ears. So, listen to this passage again from the modern language paraphrase, The Message. This is not a translation of the text, but Eugene Peterson's interpretation of it.

"You are here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now ... 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."

Isn't that beautiful? We are Christ's light-bearers, sharing the light of God with the whole world! Not our little light, but God's gorgeous light, shining out through us. We are like prisms that refract God-colors of love-light out into the world. I love that image!

But how do we do that?

You may remember that a few weeks ago, I preached about Jesus' healing Peter's mother-in-law, and she got up out of her sick bed and served the people around her. I said then that her service was a ministry, that she "got" Jesus' message of service even when the disciples didn't, that she was the first deacon, and that often all we need to do to follow Christ's call in our lives is to be of service to those around us.

This morning, when we celebrate One Great Hour of Sharing, we have the opportunity to be of service – to share the light – not only with those in our immediate vicinity, but with people around the world. This is an easy task for us, and one that does so much good in God's name.

One Great Hour of Sharing began seventy-five years ago, on Easter Day in 1949. A nation-wide radio program challenged Christians to donate one million dollars in one hour to help people devastated by the aftermath of World War II. Faithful Christians answered that challenge and met the goal. In one hour.

Since that first offering, One Great Hour of Sharing has expanded to support domestic and international development, fight debilitating poverty, provide relief for communities devastated by war or natural disaster, support refugees and displaced persons, and combat injustice in many forms. When we participate in One Great Hour of Sharing, we join Christians from many denominations to support these

efforts, so our gifts can do so much more than if we tried to solve any of these terrible problems on our own.

Here is just one story of someone who has been helped by our gifts to One Great Hour of Sharing: Don Pedro Antonio Maldonado lives in the Honduran countryside. When the COVID pandemic came in 2019, his family lost the ability to support themselves and considered migrating to the United States. Instead, they made the difficult decision to stay where they were and to trust in God to help them. They received the blessing they had been praying for. Church World Service provided funding through One Great Hour of Sharing for Pedro to participate in a food security program. He received chickens, a piglet, sheep, and a cow. He also received training in vegetable gardening, animal care, fertilization, and vegetation, and he has become his village's expert in these skills. His family now has a steady income and is able to remain in Honduras.

Pedro says that he teaches the people of his village by doing – actually doing the job – not by sharing theory. They see that if he can do it, then the whole village – which faces limitations – can do it, too. “It is my best accomplishment,” he says, and he gives credit to God for his success. Our gifts to One Great Hour of Sharing, together with gifts from Christians around the world, made this story possible, and so many more stories like it.

This offering has long been a special one in my heart. I remember, as a child, receiving a little cardboard box in Sunday School and filling it up with coins each week, then bringing it back to church for the One Great Hour of Sharing offering. I remember a few years ago when we were all locked down in the pandemic. We had all received stimulus checks in March of that year, and Fred and Margee challenged us to give a tithe of what we received to the One Great Hour of Sharing offering. Our offering that year was over \$1000. The following year, our Mathes Mission Matching Fund increased our gifts. And because of the Doschers' challenge to us and our Mission Matching Fund, last year this little church was named one of the highest per capita donors in the whole UCC to One Great Hour of Sharing.

Now, I don't know how you budget for mission giving. I personally budget a small, set amount each month for whatever the Mission of the Month is. But this offering feels different to me. It is one that pulls at my heart strings a little harder. So, this month, I am making an extra mission donation. What I can afford to give is not a lot. But my gift plus your gift, and yours, and yours, plus gifts from Christians everywhere will add up to far more than we could do on our own. So, I invite you to be generous this month – as you always are – in your support of the One Great Hour of Sharing offering. We will receive gifts through Easter Day for this wonderful cause. And may every penny that we contribute help God's light shine out somewhere in this world, where help is urgently needed, where wars rage and natural disasters wreak havoc, where God's children are suffering.

Jesus Christ has made us light-bearers, and he does not want us to hide that light under a basket. Jesus has put us on a light stand and commanded us, “Shine!”

We are like prisms, refracting God-colors of love-light out to the whole world. So, let us share the light, not just here in our own community, but wherever there is need. Let us be light-bearers. Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine!

Amen