12th Sunday after Trinity
SERIES ON DISCIPLESHIP - LIGHT OF THE WORLD
West Henrietta - 1961

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IN NOMINE JESU

St. Matthew 5: 14-16 Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Our world sits in darkness and in the shadow of death. We need only open our eyes to see that this is true. Recently, a well-known English actor was bemoaning his misfortune in having been divorced by his fourth wife. He said that divorce is an unpleasant business, something like nicking yourself while shaving. Many people, no doubt, laughed at his airy flippancy. This irreverent attitude toward the sacred institution established by God Himself is but one little example of the dank odor of decay and death that surrounds our world. According to the historian, Arnold Toynbee, twenty-one civilizations have arisen since the dawn of history. Fourteen have passed out of existence, having decayed and died. They died because they were no longer able or worthy to live. In a day when divorce is becoming almost as common as marriage, when lust and immorality, hatred and prejudice, greed and graft, crime and violence, are becoming the rule rather than the exception; we ought to begin to recognize that sweetly sickening odor which accompanies death.

We have no way of knowing how long God will sit aside and watch as men defiantly flout and despise His Will, but this much is certain: The Day of Judgment is near at hand. Modern man is living under the constant threat of mutual annihilation. A German scientist reports that there are now enough bombs in stock piles to wipe out the whole population of the earth in 24 hours. Those who are in a position to know are living in terror of what the world may do to itself. This time it will be for keeps. The whole house of civilization with its churches, schools, factories, homes, its learning, beauty, and pleasure will go puff. And what stragglers may be left will be hiding in caves, calling on the hills to cover them and the mountains to fall on them. So a world that doesn't believe in judgment and laughs at hell is taking the sword out of God's hands and is holding it ready to fall on it.

At such a time as this Christ calls His followers to faithful discipleship: You are the light of the world, He says. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let you light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Light, like life, begins with God. The Bible assures us that God is Light. Into the darkness that once covered the earth God called an order: Let ther be light. And there was light. And ever since that time a great ray of cheerful light has been moving round and round the earth. But scarcely had man begun to live in the light of the new day when the darkness of sin and all its evil consequences enveloped his heart and life. Once more God said, Let there be light. His great love moved Him to announce that He would send a Light that would dispel the darkness of evil in man's heart and life: the promised Messiah. It was God's way of saying to the darkness of hatred, Let there be the light of love; to the darkness of doubt and cynicism, Let there be the light of faith; to the darkness of sorrow, Let there be the light of joy; to the darkness of fear, Let there be the light of strength and courage; and - most important of all - to the darkness of sin and guilt, Let there be the light of forgiveness and salvation. And throughout the stretches of the Old Testament, as Isaiah reminds us, The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined.

Finally, there came a night when suddenly the darkness that covered the fields of Bethlehem fled before the brilliant light of heaven, in which shone the glory of God. And an honored angel made the most wonderful announcement ever to be heard on earth: Unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord. When this human and yet also divine Child grew up, so holy was His life and so complete was His triumph over sin that He could say of Himself, I am the light of the world. Christ's great Apostle Paul could write for all time

of those who learn to know and love and follow Christ, God, who first ordered light to shine in darkness, has flooded our hearts with His light. We now can enlighten men only because we can give them knowledge of the glory of God, as we see it in the face of Jesus Christ.

You and I, who have seen the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, are called upon to shine! Lights are made to shine. A light that does not shine ceases to be a light. Christians are made to be Christian. The disciple who ceases to reflect the light of Christ forfeits his discipleship. A Christian can no more hide his love for the Savior than a city on top of a hill can be inconspicuous. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let you light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. If in our daily life we give way to anger and envy, if we quarrel and bicker and squabble and use language that cuts and hurts, whether we know it or not we are proclaiming to others that we are not Christ's disciples. If we eat, drink, work, sleep like the rest of the world, and no more, if we weakly drift with the others and don't use our time or energy for our God and our Savior, if we let the gifts we have rust and go to waste; then we are hiding our light under and bushel - and we are not Christian!

Bernard of Claivaux, the French theologian, once said, What we love, we shall grow to resemble. With that in mind, Christ's statement is clear. Those who truly love Christ will come to be like Him. They will try to imitate His holy life. Like Him they will be kind and merciful and understanding and patient and forgiving. His burning desire for a world in which all men live in the light of God's glory will be their burning desire. Toward the end of His ministry Christ gave His followers this ~~Later He gave them their~~ No. 1 directive: Go and make disciples of all nations....Preach the Gospel to ever creature. They were to tell others - all others - the story of God's love in Him that they might share the joy of Christian faith and living. They were to do so, not by force nor by power of argumentation. Behind their preaching was to be the example of what Christ

meant to them in their life. The early missionaries explained their work by saying, The Lord has commanded us, 'I have set you to be a light...that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth.' Paul writes to his Christian friends, Be imitators of God, as beloved children. Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us..; For once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light.

That is exactly what the early Christians did. Tertullian, a leader in the early Christian Church said that he and most of the converts who came out of paganism in his day, were first attracted to Christ, not by books and sermons, but by observing how the Christians lived and died. The early Christians let the light of their Christian faith shine where others could see it. They encouraged one another to do so, as Paul wrote to young Timothy, Set an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. They were truly the light of the world. Their example was observed also by those who did not share their faith. Celsus, a critic of the early Christians, wrote of them in amazement, These Christians love each other even before they are acquainted.

Christianity was born in a night of paganism. The darkness of pagan immorality was everywhere in evidence. Then, as now, there was urgent need for a great spiritual awakening. It came, in most splendid fashion, because Christ's followers let their light shine. The world awoke to a new day, bright with the light of Christian faith and living. Gradually, however, Christ's followers forgot their great obligation. They hid their light under a bushel. The Dark Ages came and lay heavily on the world for about a thousand years. Then Martin Luther, glorious troublemaker son of the church, came to see clearly the glory of Christ, the Light of the World. As Chappell wrote of what followed, Through the light that blazed from Luther's hot heart and radiant face there came a great awakening. It will always be remembered as the Great Reformation.

One of the most familiar words in the early church was the word brother. Critics sometimes complain that the Bible makes no direct attack on slavery, see scholars discussion. But it does better. It calls all believers to be brothers, and that is the sure end

of all oppression. It is easy for us to drop the first "r" out of "brother." Is that the way you feel about other Christians? Are they brothers or bothers?

A city missionary was once visiting one of the lowest and degrading sections of London. A woman said to him, You say you care for us and are anxious about us, but it is an easy thing for you to come from your clean, quiet home and just visit us. Would you come and bring your family and live here and expose yourself to all these evils day after day in order to lift us up? The missionary felt he had hardly enough love for that. But Jesus lived in the midst of sinners. He rubbed elbows with them, and drank with them, and died in order to save them. We can do little real good unless we identify ourselves with those who suffer and are in need, both physically & spiritually. If we will take them by the hand, so to speak, and let the light of Christ shine through us, we shall see greater results in our efforts to win souls for Christ, and our own conduct will be more Christ-like.

The early Christians did not live as though they meant to stay here on earth. They were sure that their task was to be a pilgrim people, on the move, hastening to the ends of the earth to gather in God's scattered children. Today we can see something of an analogy in the new Peace Corps, whose members will go out to help in the most elementary kind of tasks. They have been referred to as freedom missionaries. Let us suppose a church body had come up with some such a challenge for its youth, promising only travel costs and keep for those interested in serving overseas: What great things could be accomplished for Christ & for the world!

You are the light of the world:..Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven. In my study, sitting on my desk, is a little phosphorescent cross which shines in the dark. I keep it there to remind me of the glowing radiance of Christ's great love and sacrifice for me. But sometimes it doesn't shine. Then I have to take it into the sunlight. There it will absorb the sun's rays, and when it is taken again into the dark, it will shine. If the light of your faith is not shining as it should, go to the cross, feel afresh the warmth of God's forgiveness, and then go and shine as a reflector of Christ's love. It may well be that God will use you and me in

another great Christian awakening that may yet prevent impending world disaster. Let your light shine. And God bless you.

Amen.