SERIES ON DISCIPLESHIP - THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD Rev. Carl F. Thrun
Rolling Meadows - 1963

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; that it giveth light unto all that are in th 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. It gathers aroun us like a thick cloud - drinking, and dancing, and Godforgetting - the bombing of churches - parents stabbing their children - dishonesty and graft and greed - drunkenness and carousing - hatred and violence - wholesale murder - lust and immorality. 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 long able or worthy to live. In a day when divorce is becoming almost as commor as marriage - when people defiantly fly in the face of God and His Word and Will - we ought to begin to recognize that sweetly sickening odor which accompanies death.

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 your 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 there be light. And there was light. And ever since a great ray of cheerful light has been moving around the earth. But scarcely had man begun to live in the light of this new day when the darkness of sin and its evil consequences enveloped his heart and life. Once more God spoke: 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 - His own Son, 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.

Then one night in an obscure town called Bethlehem the darkness fled before the brilliant light of heaven and the glory of God. Angels brought the Good Tidings to men: Unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord. When this human - yet 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 learned 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 your 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 recognize it or not - we are proclaiming to others that we are not Christ's disciples. If we eat, drink, work, sleep, play like the rest of the world AND NO MORE - if we weakly drift with the others and don't use our time or energy in the service of God and our Savior - if we let the gifts and talents we have rust and go to waste - then we are hiding our light under a bushel - and what is worse, we are not Christian. It is as simple as that!

Bernard of Claivaux, the French theologian, once said, What we love, we shall grow to resemble. 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. Christ's burning desire for a world in which all men live in the light of God's glory will be their burning desire. They will take seriously Christ's # 1 directive: Go and make disciples of all nations...Preach the Gospel to every creature. They will be eager - at great cost and great sacrifice - to tell others - all others - the story of God's love in Christ that they too might share the joy of Christian faith and living. Behind their speaking and their witnessing will be the example of what Christ has meant to them in their life. The early missionaries explained their work this way: 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 wrote the Christians of his day: 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 they 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. These early Christians let their faith shine so that others could see it. They encouraged one another, as Paul wrote to young Timothy, Set an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. They

were 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. They were people with a purpose, people who stood out in the darkness of their time. They did not live as though they meant to stay here on earth. They were sure that their task was to be a pilgrim people, moving on and up out of this world, hastening to the ends of the earth to gather in God's scattered children.

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 splendid fashion, because Christ's disciples let their light shine. The world awoke to a new day, bright with the light of Christian faith and living. Then Christ's followers began to hide their light under a bushel. The Dark Ages came and lay heavily upon the world for about a thousand years. Then an Augustinian Monk - Martin Luther - glorious roughneck 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 against slavery, race, or class discrimination. It does better. It calls all believers to be brothers, and that is the sure end of oppression. Unfortunately, the darkness of our time is seen in the fact that many find it easy to drop the first "r" out of brother and treat Christians of other races and colors as 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. Can we do less? Suffering and tears and despair and dying - hunger and misery and want - starving children and the lonely aged — this is the darkness that pleads with us to bring light and relief and redemption.

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. At times, however, it does not shine. Then I must take it back into the sunlight. There it absorbs 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 and light of God's love and forgiveness - and then go out and shine — shine with the glory and radiance of your Redeemer's own great love and compassion. It may well be that God will use you and me in another great Christian awakening to bring hope and life to our dark and dying world. You are the light of the world. Let your light shine, and God bless you. Amen.