

“Go, Make a Difference”

Matthew 5:14-16

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Our Scripture reading is part of Jesus’ sermons often well known as “the beatitudes” to his disciples and the crowd on the mount. Jesus’ message is simple and clear. “You are the light of the world. And let your light shine before others.” Even today, Jesus also speaks to us and our Fair Oaks United Methodist Church to be light and let our light shine. What is that? ***How does this simple message powerfully challenge us?*** Let me repeat our Scripture reading again for you using Eugene Peterson’s paraphrased version in *The Message*:

Here’s another way to put it: **You’re 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 that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—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. (*The Message*)

This morning, I invite you to go deeper to discover what it really means to ***be light, go public with this*** and ***shine*** from this Jesus’ imperative.

Unlike Pharisees or Seducers, Jesus dared to proclaim that everyone is a child of God and God is not a secret to be kept. We are the light of the world to shine God’s characters, virtues and goodness to the public. Everyone regardless of gender, cultures, race, sexual orientation and ages is born with God’s diverse colors for the world. We, children of God are accepted by Christ’s grace and called to bring out the God-colors to our community and the world. The church’s mission is to make God be known and God’s light to be shown to the public through our faith in actions. This is the church’s spiritual identity!

The last two weeks, our hearts have been quite disturbed and uneasy by two political issues: The violence in Charlottesville in Virginia and the heightened tension for war between North Korea and the United States. These seem to be different but there is common ground: the evil Spirit of hatred, bigotry and violence towards each other. These negative spiritual forces really make my heart and soul uneasy. I don’t mean to ignore the complexities of political and international affairs. Even the President Donald Trump

acknowledged that North Korea-China relationship is not an easy matter. Personally I don't want to talk about politics in public, especially in the pulpit. As a preacher, I am allowed and honored to speak about God's embracing love, peace, reconciliation and Jesus Christ, our Savior's compassion. Here, what I am going to share with you is not social activism advocating any particular political party's stance. But I want to speak for the social holiness as a Methodist preacher. Just imagine if you put yourself in Jesus' shoes when you deal with hatred and violence, for example, the occurrences in Charlottesville last and North Korea. What would Jesus inspire you to do as followers of Christ in these matters?

A couple of weeks ago, one of my Methodist colleagues, Rev. Bill Shilady recently published a devotional book about Hilary Clinton, "*Strong for a Moment Like This.*" He was interviewed on CNN news. I was surprised to see him on TV because he and I serve on our denomination's pension ministry, *Wespath* as board of directors. In the interview, a news anchor asks him a political question about the president's moral authority to take out the North Korea's leader by a just war or precise strike possibility. The news anchor quoted a Mega-church pastor Robert Jeffress' biblical perspective. He says, "In Romans 13, when it comes to how we should deal with evildoers, the Bible, in the book of Romans, is clear: God has endowed rulers full power to use whatever means necessary-including war-to stop evil. In the case of North Korea, God has given Trump authority to take out Kim Jong Un." Pastor Bill Shilady responded, "Love your neighbor finding peace and reconciliation." He continued to say, "Perhaps, the just war theory doesn't apply in this case. I don't necessarily agree with this evangelical pastor."

I am not a political expert so I cannot analyze these issues. Don't get me wrong. I am not a Mennonite pastor who opposes to every war. But the Mega-church pastor Jeff's comment makes me worry about a possibility of World War III. I am a peace-advocate person because I believe that Jesus teaches us to pursue peace. I follow our Methodist three simple rules, "Do no harm, do good and stay in touch with God" and Jesus' golden rule in Matthew 7:12, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" Jesus never taught us how to fight darkness, eliminate darkness or kill enemies but commands us to be peace-makers, be light and pray for our enemies. Do not interpret the Bible for your own wishful thinking. C.S Lewis, a great Christianity advocate has once said.

It is Christ Himself, not the Bible, who is the true word of God. The Bible, read in the right spirit and with the guidance of good teachers, will bring us to Him. We must not use the Bible as a sort of encyclopedia out

of which texts can be taken for use as weapons.”¹

What Jesus inspires us to know from today’s Scripture reading is the true meaning to be the light of the world. In Aesop fables, *the North Wind and the Sun* illustrates the power of light.

The story concerns a competition between the North Wind and the Sun to decide which is the stronger of the two. The challenge was to make a passing traveler remove his cloak. However hard the North Wind blew, the traveler only wrapped his cloak tighter to keep warm. But when the Sun shone, the traveler was overcome with heat and soon took his cloak off.²

Light seems to be weaker and less powerful than the North wind, but eventually the light won the competition. As in Romans 12:21, the Apostle Paul tells, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Let us go back to the Scripture reading and listen carefully to Jesus’ sermon to his disciples and crowd on the mount. Jesus didn’t say that we are the weapons or racists of the world to kill our enemies. In other words, we are not called to “light our own fire” but we are called to be the reflections of God’s goodness, love and compassion. Jesus also challenges us in Matthew 5:44 “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” Jesus says, “For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed”³

In Jesus’ time, rabbis and religious authorities were, themselves referred to as the “lights”. In other words, political authorities and religious leaders believe that they have privileges to be the representatives of God and God’s goodness. But Jesus taught his disciples and followers proclaiming that everyone is “God’s light bearer”.

God’s mission is a risk taking work because it requires us to come out of our comfort zone. The church and our Christian faith are called to go and shine our light and make a difference in our community. Friends, remember that our Fair Oaks Church is here on a hilltop to shine! I hope and pray that our church community will be ‘God’s lighthouse’ to reach out and help those find God’s

¹ <http://www.essentialcslewis.com/2017/08/05/ccslq-38-christ-himself-bible/> Accessed Aug. 25 2017

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_North_Wind_and_the_Sun Accessed Aug. 25 2017

³ The Gospel of John 3:19–20.

grace and love through our ministries. Especially we hope to reach out to those who are lost in their ways, so that they can find a right direction for their lives. I hope that we brighten their paths. Amen.