



# *Lakeside Sermons*

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina  
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THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

## Color Your World Acts 11:19-26; Matthew 5:13-16

A couple of weeks ago, I was out in the yard on a Thursday evening picking up pine cones. This is a task that no one in our family enjoys, but one I manage to avoid on a regular basis. When cutting the grass I will toss some of the cones in the natural areas or kick them out of the way of the lawnmower, but I do not like picking them up one by one. Anyway, on this particular evening, for some reason I chose to get out in the yard and collect a bucketful of cones. As I made my way down a narrow corridor of grass on the far side of the house, I glanced toward the natural area where a large clump of azaleas grows. The lavender and magenta blossoms that had burst forth during Easter had long died away, but beside the large shrubs was a small bush that produces white blooms later in the spring. Sure enough, it was full of small, snow white blossoms--except that it wasn't, not entirely. In the middle of the bush, surrounded by white flowers and green leaves, was a single pink blossom, a splash of bright color which was like a cheery "Hello!" on a dull day.

I stopped and stared at this oddity, trying to figure out how it happened. Could a pink bloom grow on a white azalea bush? Was it on the branch of pink azalea which had sneaked its way over into its neighbor's territory? Yet, no other pink blossoms could be found. It was odd, but beautiful, puzzling but thrilling. It made me smile.

The folks in Louisiana have a word for such things: lagniappe. Traditionally it is a little extra gift, especially for children, given when you purchase something. It is a gift of goodwill, a kindness not expected. That pink bloom was lagniappe, a surprise like so many others that come into my life from time to time. I am certain you have a collection of such memories as well.

Often such surprises come unintentionally. They happen or I stumble upon them. On numerous occasions, however, they are gifts offered intentionally by someone else. A phone call to say, "I'm thinking of you." A card that says, "Thank you." A hug that says, "I care about you." An act of courtesy. A wave from a stranger. A kind word from a store clerk. These

things are unexpected but come as gifts, little splashes of color in our ordinary days.

When he was teaching people about how to live together in the world, Jesus spoke plainly and used metaphors they (and we) could understand. "You are the salt of the earth," he said, "You are the light of the world . . . Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." Bring a little flavor to life. Shine a little light in the world, not as a spotlight focused on you, but as a ray of sunshine bringing warmth and light into a sometimes cold and dark world.

We have reached that point in the cycle of the year when we spread out into other places. We travel near or far for vacation, often to familiar places, sometimes to a place new to us but ancient with history and culture. Some of our young people are moving into the world to study, to find their way, and to make a life for themselves. Job changes occur. Life changes take place. We travel a variety paths in life, but we can all shine a little light wherever we are. We can add a dash of color to places that could use a bit of beauty. We can brighten the day for someone who lives in a shadow. We all remember that moment in *The Wizard of Oz* movie when Dorothy emerges from the black and white world of the tornado, the farm house, and the oppressive meddling of Elvira Gulch and steps into the technicolor world of Munchkinland. Not only is there color everywhere, but suddenly everything is more interesting. In the same way, when our spirits are lifted, when our mood is changed, we notice things we might have overlooked. We hear sounds we might have ignored. We feel emotions that might have been tamped down inside us.

On a hillside overlooking a sparkling sea, Jesus told everyone who would listen that no matter where they were, where they went, or what they did, they could be salt. They could bring light. They could color their world. So can we. We can add a surprising dash of color wherever we go and whatever we do.

I must admit that Muhammad Ali was never someone I admired. I remember when he changed his name and his religion, but, as a child, I could not understand why anyone would change either of those things. At that point in time, few of us knew anything about Islam and certainly had never met a Muslim. I knew he was against the war, but I did not know enough about the reasons to understand why. I did know that he was a boxer and knew enough about boxing to understand that of all sports, it is one which has as its

singular goal to inflict pain and injury on another person. I did not like boxing and I did not care for Muhammad Ali.

This past week I realized how I had focused on things about the man but never on the man himself. My mind changed as I listened to family, friends, and reporters talk about a man who fought, not only opponents in the ring, but bigger opponents in the arena of life. In very public ways he battled bigotry, racism, public opinion, and, of course, Parkinson's disease. I never understood the depth of his faith, assuming his conversion was a publicity stunt to garner attention and match his pompous personality. I never paid attention to the value he placed upon peace and non-violence, probably because he made his living by a violent sport. I never noticed his sense of humor, his ease with people of all types, his compassion, or his generosity. I certainly never understood his courage in dealing openly with Parkinson's disease.

Like many of you, I watched as Ali was handed the Olympic torch in 1996 and moved, shuffling and shaking, to light the cauldron which would herald the games in Atlanta that year. For me, it was a sad commentary on the sport which had caused so much damage to so many people. I failed to see the courage he displayed in standing before the world, determined to do something that his body fought against doing. I failed to see the champion he was for millions of people who live with that disease, who fight courageously against a disease that taunts them to give up and go down for the count. I failed to see the splash of color and tremendous hope he brought to so many people. Thousands of people gathered for his memorial service. Millions of people grieved all over the world. He was eulogized by clerics and comics and a former President. All these people reacted to his death, not merely because a heavyweight boxing champion had died, but because a bit of color had faded from their lives. A bright light had gone out. Someone who spiced up the world was no longer among us.

Writing in his Acts of the Apostles, Luke tells us that after Stephen was stoned to death for living his faith so boldly, believers were scattered into Asia Minor. For the most part, they lived among fellow Jews and helped them understand that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. Some of the believers, however, became friends with Greeks and gladly shared with them the Good News of Jesus and all he had done for us. In Antioch, large numbers of Greeks became believers and, Luke tells us, for the first time followers were called "little Christs"--or Christians, as we know such people today.

Our calling as followers of Jesus Christ is to do what he did and bring light and color to our world. We know, of course, that the colors we see result from the ways in which light interacts with whatever it encounters and the way we perceive the light with our eyes. Light does not come in particular colors; rather, it interacts with whatever it illumines to produce a particular color or colors and our eyes and brains interpret that light for us. Jesus reminded us that we are called to interact with one another and the world in such a way that we illumine the uniqueness of each person and situation. We are called to bring clarity, but also to highlight beauty and goodness and hope. We can color our world in a variety of ways, but we are called to do so in ways that reflect the love of God.

Years ago, I heard a "real, live missionary," as we used to call them, say, "Wherever there is a Christian and a need, there is a mission field." That means that there are multiple missions fields right here in this sanctuary today. There are an abundance of mission fields in the neighborhood around us. There are untold mission fields throughout our city and county. And one can hardly go anywhere in the world that you do not bump into a mission field every few feet. That means that multiple times each day, we have opportunities to add color to our world. We can say a kind word, do a kind deed, help someone in trouble, and be Christ to the next person we meet. It is not difficult, but it does often take courage and compassion.

Last Sunday Cecelia Beck shared with us her ministry in a struggling neighborhood in Shelby, North Carolina where she bumps into needs day and night. Like a flower blooming in the midst of poverty, apathy, drugs, gangs, crime, and violence, Cecelia's presence brings a bit of hopeful color to her neighbors. She offers light to illumine a different path for the children who live around her. She helps them to understand they can flavor their lives using a different recipe than what they have been taught. By the grace of God, Cecelia Beck helps to color the world for people who have lost all perception of beauty and wonder.

Where are you going this summer? Where are you doing in life? Sometimes we get scattered for a few weeks or months. Sometimes we get scattered forever. Yet, no matter where we are, even if we do not leave home, we can shine a little light and add a little spice to the lives around us. You or I may well be the paintbrush God chooses to add a splash of color to an otherwise plain canvas of life. We may be the one who turns on the light of God's love and illumines the beauty and wonder of the world for someone else. Allow God to use all that is good and beautiful within you to bring that same goodness and beauty to the people around you. Amen.

June 12, 2016

## Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

On a bright and beautiful day like this one, we know what it means for you to be our light and our salvation, O God. Light dispels some shadows and clearly defines others. It brings the landscape into sharper focus and enables us to do our work. Light diminishes our fears and brightens our spirits. Knowing that you illumine our lives and clarify the boundaries between right and wrong, good and evil, blessing and curse, gives us hope and inner peace.

We thank you for all of the goodness you bring into our lives. We are grateful for family which anchors us to life and friends who add dimension to our days. We are grateful for work and study, for health and well-being, for shelter and food and all of the necessities of life. We thank you for every good gift which comes our way, O God, because we know goodness falls from your gracious hand.

We pray for all who lack the good that we all ought to enjoy. Too many people in our community and world live without benefit of a safe home, nutritious food, loving family, or meaningful work. Too many people are ill in body, mind, and spirit and struggle to get the help they need. We pray for all who have particular needs. Provide for their care, we pray. Provide for their health and safety. Provide for their being in the world in a way that is meaningful and purposeful. And use us, O God, to help meet these needs through our generosity and influence.

Our world is a dynamic place, changing moment by moment. We face opportunities and crises day by day. Help us, O God, to have clarity in understanding about what goes on around us. Grant us wisdom in the choices that we make and courage for the battles we must fight. Illumine the path you would have us walk and journey with us into the life you would have us live. Shine through our particular personalities and bring beauty to our world, we pray, for we ask these things in the name of Christ. Amen.