

“Let it Shine”

I have in my hand a flashlight. It's a rather small flashlight, but it's bright enough for me to use it when I need it. I realized not too long ago that there have been times that my use of this flashlight could maybe be considered strange or funny. See, the flashlight usually sits on top of my dresser, in my bedroom. There are plenty of occasions when in that room I am the only person awake, including times when a particular infant is sleeping. And trust me, I don't want to wake a sleeping baby.

So the funny thing that I have done with this flashlight is that I've found it in the dark and turned it on to help me see and then immediately covered it up, usually by setting the end of the flashlight firmly on my hip or leg. Sure, then I'll sort of sneak out a little bit of light so that maybe I can find my way around, but I'm usually more concerned that I don't wake up anyone who is sleeping by brightening the room too much.

I couldn't help but think about situations like those as I was working through the sermon text for today. In a couple of questions, Jesus points to a similar strange or funny way of operating a lamp. Of course, Jesus and his followers didn't have battery operated flashlights. Instead, they had oil lamps. Oil lamps are fairly simple. They have a main part that would be filled with oil, commonly olive oil that was available in that region. They would also have a wick, somewhat like a candle wick, a piece of cloth or rope that would soak up some of the oil, and would stick out of the lamp. You could set fire to that wick, much like our ushers do to the oil candles on the altar, and you would have a light source that was quite usable.

So, Jesus asked, would you take the lamp and put it under the bed? Of course not! Would you set a bowl over the top of it? That would be foolish. The only way for the lamp to serve its purpose best is to put it on its stand. From the stand it can shine its light throughout the otherwise dark room.

Jesus' point is not that we need instructions for using oil lamps. His most pressing concern was not fire safety. Instead, Jesus used this every day, real life example to teach a deeper spiritual truth. Jesus was offering encouragement to his followers regarding their lives as Christians. We, too, ought to take to heart the message illustrated by the lamp and put it to use in our lives.

The parable here of the lamp was one of many parables that Jesus used to teach his followers. Parables are interesting teaching tool. For some people, they were impossible to understand. The people who didn't really take to heart what Jesus taught couldn't comprehend the spiritual meaning of these earthly stories that Jesus told. Even Jesus' closest disciples sometimes needed some extra explanation. But once the hearer grasped the main point, the parable served its purpose well. It took something that people knew well--things like lamps and stands and bedrooms--to teach them about things that they couldn't have been familiar with, like the kingdom of God and the forgiveness of sins.

Today, we're less familiar with many of the specific items in Jesus' parables, but we have the many passages of Scripture to help us to understand what Jesus is talking about.

Jesus has revealed to us in his Word that he is the Light of the world. From the time of Adam and Eve on, this world has been a dark place, a place darkened by sin and unbelief. By nature, we like everyone else in the world, are inclined only toward evil and away from God.

Only Jesus has broken the darkness. Only he lived and loved perfectly. Only he served others first and foremost instead of serving himself. By his teaching and by his life, he demonstrated that he truly is the Light of our world. And that means more than just showing us how to live or teaching in an enlightening manner. That means that Jesus' main purpose was to destroy the darkness of sin and to give forgiveness and eternal life.

When the message of Jesus goes out, when it is shared with others that their sins are forgiven, the Light of the world is shared. It's as if the oil lamp is lit in a person's life, or perhaps as if a flashlight is turned on. So, what do we do then? Do we hide the flashlight so that at best only a little light can possibly shine out, but never enough to disturb anyone? Do we take the lamp and find a bowl that will sit nicely over the top of it? Do we set it under a bed or a couch so that the dark room can stay dark?

Unfortunately, yes. Far too often that is exactly what we do. Perhaps we follow along with society's current views of marriage and family and children instead of standing up for God's truth, that he established marriage and family for our benefit and blessing. And a small corner of our world remains in darkness.

Perhaps we sit quietly as friends or classmates mock the idea that there is a God who could have created the world. They say that science has taken us well past the need for any ancient superstition. And even though we have something to say, we let the darkness grow deeper.

Perhaps we don't make our Sunday morning worship and Bible Study routine a priority in our lives, and instead allow other concerns to crowd it out. Perhaps we don't even consider what impression that gives to our own children, or to our fellow members, or even to our friends and neighbors. And perhaps, even though we never intended it, our own light grows dim.

You, believer, have a role to play. You have a God-given responsibility. You are a lamp that he lit by the power of his Word. You have been assured, and I am here to assure you again, that Jesus died for every single one of your sins. And that means that he died for all the times that you have failed to let your light shine to others.

So now what? Do you take the lamp and hide it? That's what Jesus is asking. And the answer he expects is "no." Instead, you take that lamp and set it on its stand, where it gives light to the whole room. **"For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."** Like all spiritual matters, the good news that Jesus died for the world's sins is hidden from darkened human hearts. But like a fancy engagement ring hidden away in a tiny box it is not meant to stay hidden but to be revealed. The Light of the world has given you the opportunity to reveal him to others. From Old Testament times it was for all nations, as Psalm, 67 reminded us today. Paul testified, as we heard earlier, that he would adjust his lifestyle for the very purpose of sharing that Word (1 Corinthians 9:19-22).

And those are the examples that Jesus calls on us to imitate.

Matthew's Gospel records similar words of Jesus where he says, **"In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven"** (Matthew 5:16). Letting your light shine—placing the lamp on its stand—means that we live in a way that sets us apart from the sinful world around us by following God's laws. It means that we carefully consider the way that we speak and act, and that we strive to do so in a way that brings honor and glory to our Savior. It means that as we have opportunity, we tell others about what Jesus has done for us. And in so doing, Jesus promises that we, too, will be blessed. He says, **"With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him."**

I have another flashlight here. This one, to the best of my recollection, I've never covered over in order to make the light dim. In fact, quite the opposite. When I first got this flashlight a number of years ago, it was one of the best flashlights I knew about. The whole point of it was that it would consistently provide a strong and steady light when it was needed. We live in a world that absolutely needs a strong a steady light in the darkness. You have the light. Let it shine.

Sermon Text: Mark 4:21–25 (NIV84)

<sup>21</sup> He said to them, “Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don’t you put it on its stand? <sup>22</sup> For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open. <sup>23</sup> If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.”

<sup>24</sup> “Consider carefully what you hear,” he continued. “With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more. <sup>25</sup> Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.”