

Saint Mark Presbyterian Church

July 26, 2020

"The God-Colors of the world"

Matthew 5:14-16

Do you remember what it was like to walk out of the bright, blinding sunshine on a day like today into a darkened restaurant for lunch or dinner? When you walk in the door, it's kind of dark in there, and as you get in there, you can hardly see your way around. You can't focus on the people at the tables, or the décor, or the pictures on the wall. It is disorienting. Sometimes you have a hard time even looking at the menu - you order by faith and not by sight.

But then in a short time, a miracle occurs - Oh we don't think of it as a miracle - we take it for granted. Our eyes adjust to the darkness. In a short time, it no longer appears dark to us anymore. What seemed dark before now seems comfortable. Our eyes adjust, we can now see people at other tables, the menu, the paintings on the wall.

When we lived in Florida, after being inside someplace like that, we would go to leave and open the door again to the outside, the sunshine is so bright you have to shield your eyes, or look away because now you are used to the darkness. The light seems harsh and painful.

In 2020, living in our world has become a little like that - an imperfect analogy to be sure, but one which contains some truths. Have our eyes become accustomed to darkness? Accustomed to gun violence? Accustomed to economic and racial inequality? Have we become

adjusted to a culture which has to create reality-based tv shows where we amuse ourselves with the pain and struggle of others?

I don't think we will ever adjust to the death and disease that COVID-19 is causing, but I am concerned that some of our national leaders have a strategy that we will at least become accustomed to it.

I don't think we will ever adjust to the threat of climate change, but to some it is happening so gradually that we are becoming accustomed to it.

I never want to adjust to the level of division and anger in our civic discourse, but there is a sense that we are becoming accustomed to it.

We should never adjust to the killing of unarmed people of color in our streets, but before this year did we become accustomed to it?

Just as Jesus used Salt as a metaphor which we looked at last week, the ideas of darkness and light are among his most powerful and frequent. It is one of the fundamental images of the whole Biblical witness. I believe that Jesus Christ wants to throw open the door to let the blinding light shine on the world, that we may clearly see how we can respond to a world often overcome with darkness.

This passage really is an optimistic passage - it is all about light, and not darkness. It is about how God can make something redemptive in tragedy or disaster. It is about how people get the strength to overcome adversity. How people get through impossible situations. And who people turn to when the going gets tough.

The amazing thing about this scripture today is that Jesus Christ is telling his followers - us - that we are the light of the world. We are the city on the hill - we are the ones to lead others out of that dark restaurant of our culture and into the light of God. To re-orient their priorities. To re-evaluate their lives, and consider that God would have them live in a different way.

If we are to be the light of the world in that sense, God would have us ask ourselves two questions. They may sound simple, but they are not always easy to answer:

1. Are you plugged into the power source? We absolutely cannot be the light of the world under our own power. I had to laugh that as I was looking over my message last night, the power went out in our house. It is hard to imagine any part of our lives that is not affected if we lose power - no AC, no food in the fridge, no light to read, and on and on.

This is the same question we ask ourselves if we are not constantly plugged into a spiritual connection with Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Is there any area of life that is unaffected if we pull the plug and try to make it on our own apart from God?

(According to no less than Mother Theresa of Calcutta, her strength, her source, her focus, she said was prayer. "To keep a lamp burning" she said, "we have to keep putting oil in it")

Another way of looking at that is that our light is a reflected light. God takes our bit of light and faith

- who we are and what we have and what we can do and multiplies that into something that shines brightly.

To that end I like stories about lighthouses. One story involves two vessels at night in the fog and darkness which seem to be on a collision course. One signals to the other, "Change your course 30 degrees to the south. The other signals back through the darkness, "change YOUR course 30 degrees to the north."

The first ship signals back, "This is Admiral Pierce, US Navy. I order you to change your course 30 degrees to the south. I am a battleship."

The second signals, "This is Ensign Shultz. Change YOUR course 30 degrees to the north. I am a lighthouse"!

You know a lighthouse can be seen for a long way off. But some of them are able to do that with just a 500 watt bulb and a prism and some reflective glass. The prism takes that little bit of light and multiplies it and that light goes out for many miles.

That is the kind of light that God asks us to be - to use another metaphor - a city on a hill. We might say to God - I don't have much light to share, but God takes what we have to offer, as long as we are plugged in to the power source of the Holy Spirit, and magnifies it multiplies it.

That leads to point number 2-

2. Are you hiding your light under a bushel? Are you taking the light God is reflecting through you and hiding it under a bushel?

Another great metaphor that Jesus uses here, that everyone would have understood just as we do. In Jesus

time, homes were small and dark and damp. You can imagine, at night, with no electricity, they depended on lamps and oil to survive. That lamp was placed on a stand in the house near a small window.

When someone left the house, they did not want the light to blow out, or for there to be a danger of something catching fire while they were gone. So they would take the lamp down, and cover it with an earthen bushel. When they came back home, they would put it back on its stand where it would give light to the entire house again.

Listen again to Jesus' words: No one takes a lamp and puts it under a bushel, when you are home, but on a stand and it gives light to the whole house. Let your light so shine before the world that people will see your good works and give glory to God who is in heaven."

Or to come to that beautiful wording of Eugene Peterson - "You are here to bring out the God colors of the world - now that I have put you on a hilltop, on a light stand - shine!

How can we possibly do that in this unforgettable year of 2020?

With the darkness of the world sometimes upon us, we can do some simple, but profound things. We can be the ones who invite our friends or family to share Zoom worship or a virtual event here at the church.

We can and do pray for people who are having a dark time, and be a light to a fellow human being either inside our church family or outside.

We can be the ones who keep our heads during stressful situations - from leading by example on public health and safety - masks, distance, and so on, to economic problems - dealing with the divisive or hateful political rhetoric or blatant racism - instead of lashing out in anger, or being quick to judge someone, we can be a reflected light of Christ.

When we are able to be light in darkness, as Peterson says, then people will see what God-colors look like. What do you think those God-colors look like in your world?

For me, they are reflected by this quote from John Lewis:

A John Lewis quote:

"You are a light. You are the light. Never let anyone—any person or any force—dampen, dim or diminish your light. Study the path of others to make your way easier and more abundant. Lean toward the whispers of your own heart, discover the universal truth, and follow its dictates. [...] Release the need to hate, to harbor division, and the enticement of revenge. Release all bitterness. Hold only love, only peace in your heart, knowing that the battle of good to overcome evil is already won. Choose confrontation wisely, but when it is your time don't be afraid to stand up, speak up, and speak out against injustice. And if you follow your truth down the road to peace and the affirmation of love, if you shine like a beacon for all to see, then the poetry of all the great dreamers and philosophers is yours to manifest in a nation, a world community, and a Beloved Community that is finally at peace with itself."

Jesus says You are here to be light - bringing out the
God colors of the world. Let us never forget it. Let us
claim it for ourselves.