

The Song in the Heart of God
The Fifth Sunday After Epiphany- February 9th 2014
Matthew 5:13-20
First Baptist Church, West Jefferson
Rob Lee

Will you pray with me?

New every morning is your love Great God of Life, and all the day long you are working for good in the world. This day may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight, oh God our strength and our redeemer. Amen

When I was in Sunday School growing up, I can remember a song we used to sing, and forgive my singing here:

"This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine, this little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine, this little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine, let it shine, let it shine, let it shine."

Now I believe I'm a better preacher than singer but that song strikes at what we hear in the Gospel today. We pick up where Michael left off last week with Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus said, "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your God in heaven.

Now let's be honest. How many of us have to be reminded on a monthly, weekly, or daily basis that we have an astonishing light to share, that we are broken yet beautiful creatures and that we have potential to be people who do good works and find ourselves lost in the grace of God.

I love how Eugene Peterson's the Message puts 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."

Now this text is daunting because often times we forget the song that we learned in our youth. We forget this little light of mine when our 401k package doesn't work out the way we have planned, when the cancer comes back with a vengeance, when mental or physical illness seek to rob you of everything you've ever held dear.

But God is the ultimate songwriter; God is better than Elton John, Billy Joel, Bob Dylan or Taylor Swift or whoever might be on your mind today while I am preaching. Because God is also the best song teacher; God reminds us in the darkness of our own being, THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE! I'M GONNA LET IT SHINE!

Think about it this way: Leo Tolstoy described the childhood memory of lying on the floor gazing up at his mother as she did needlepoint. The back of her fabric, which was facing him, was riddled with knots and frayed ends of thread. When she finally revealed her handiwork, he was amazed to see a beautiful and symmetrical pattern of flowers and birds. Tolstoy likened this experience to our attempts to understand God's magnificence. Tolstoy got it that when we see madness and chaos of our surroundings, God is singing the song we once knew but now have long forgotten.¹

THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE, I'M GONNA LET IT SHINE.

Perhaps now is your time to learn the song in the heart of God. Maybe today is the day to dig deep and see the song you knew and sing it with gusto again. You see with the light of God you don't have to be a good singer to let your light shine.

Friends are you going to get your shine back again? Are you going to be lost in the beauty of your creator so that you too might remember the song in the heart of God. You know it's funny, when I first came here and started leading worship and preaching and teaching I thought I knew the song. But you all have taken me and taught me a song I never thought possible. You have reminded me of my belovedness and my intrinsic beauty. You have made me a follower of Jesus. I came to be a preacher and you have made me a disciple. You see, even the best of us, even the preachers lose our lights on occasion. I can remember you all sending cards when my bipolar was at its worst, when my roommate situation didn't work out, when my car accident took me to the brink. I realized what the song in the heart of God was, it was a song I had learned long ago and it involved a light and letting it shine. In those moments where we are most vulnerable we are surrounded by congregations and communities that uphold and support us, we have family, friends, spouses and partners who remind us again and again that we are light and we are to shine. THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE, I'M GONNA LET IT SHINE!

You see this Sermon on the Mount Jesus was teaching is about the beauty of our own souls, each and every one of us. The dirty, smelly, stinky, souls that we call home; Jesus was trying to articulate yet again the beauty and the love and the grace God offers when God says lights our candles. When God takes our light and magnifies it in such a way that we are shining like the sun, what more could we ask for?

What's holding you back? What is the thing that keeps your light from shining? Now is the time to let it go! Now is the time to remember whose you are and who you are called to be. May we be the people that light the way for Jesus the Christ the one whom prophets could only dream of. THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE, I'M GONNA LET IT SHINE

There's a popular song our youth learned at Passport camp that has lyrics such as these: "So carry your candle, run to the darkness, seek out the lonely, the tired and worn. So hold out your candle for all to see it, take your candle and go light your world."

¹ America's Four Gods, Paul Froese and Christopher Bader

Our lights are shining, our choice is clear; do we hide it under a bushel basket because we are scared of what might happen? Or do we take our candles and our lights and go light our worlds?

I can remember as a child playing with wooden trains. Our den area in our house would be filled to the brim with wooden train tracks to the point where no one could walk. But my least favorite part of playing with wooden trains would be picking them up. I felt like I'd lost something whenever it came time to put away what I had created with my imagination. But even deeper than that I remember my dad getting down on his hands and knees and helping me pick up the tracks and toy trains. He would always remind me that though I had to pick them up now, there would be a chance for my imagination to shine again.

Friends our lives and existences are like that. God, our Father got down on his hands and knees and picked up our mess. In an act of true love he embraced the beauty of our existence. He reached out his arms and though we tried to take away his shine and our shine by nailing him to a cross that terrible Friday that first Easter morning reminded us that nothing can take away our shine in the Risen Christ. No powers of evil, nothing can separate us from the light of Christ. THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE, I'M GONNA LET IT SHINE!

One Christmas many years ago, after the candlelight communion at my home church as our pastor gave the benediction he challenged us to take our candles and see if we could get them home without them blowing out. I will never forget our family surrounding the candle as we left the church and went into the wind and snow. I will never forget us with triumphant screams and laughter finally getting our light home. For that is what light is. Light is the joy that passes all our earthly understandings and keeps us going. THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE I'M GOING TO LET IT SHINE!

I'm going to change our worship order a little bit today. We're going to sing this little light of mine 4 times through instead of our closing hymn. And the ushers passed out candles before the service today and we're going to light those candles. And my challenge to you is to remember that you are the very light of the world. Nothing you can do, can keep you from shining again if your light has gone out, nothing you can do can extinguish that light. Let us remember that today and all the days of our lives, because we are the very light of this world. And in these moments, as the mystic Hafiz said, "I wish I could show you, when you are lonely or in darkness, the astonishing light of your own being." This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.