

Sermon Title: "Light of the World"  
Rev. Kevin Omi  
Scripture: Matthew 5:13-20 (at end)

February 5, 2017  
Sycamore Congregational Church UCC

---

Opening Prayer (offered spontaneously)

The Bible begins with these evocative words, *"In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while the Spirit of God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night."*

There is nothing inherently good about light or bad about darkness. Light and darkness are just different times of the day. Each is important. Living things need light in order to grow and be healthy; but they also need to be able to rest at night. Several years ago my partner, Carol and I, went to Iceland, which is much closer to the North Pole than where we are right now. During our stay in July, the sun was still up at midnight and it would disappear for a few hours and then reappear at 3 am in the morning. We had to close the curtains and for the first couple of days, put eye shades on, like these, so we could fall asleep at night.

Light is helpful, especially at night, because it helps us see, and not just big things like a wall or curb on the street, but also even very tiny things, like plant cells or one-celled animals, like amoebas we can see moving with the help of a microscope and a bright light.

Sometimes, parents will open a hallway door at night and see a sleeping young child's face just from the light that comes from the hallway, through the crack from the open door. If you have a dog or a cat, light helps you see the individual hairs that together, form their coat. If you had a really strong telescope, you could see the surface of the moon, including its craters. In the same way, moonlight can help us to see the face of someone we love at night. In all these situations, light helps us see the surface of things: the face of a child or someone we love, individual hairs on a pet, the face of the moon.

How many of you have gone camping in the woods?

If you have gone snipe hunting with flashlights in a campground, you know that light from a flashlight is not warm. It can help you see, especially trees and other people, but it is not the same kind of light you experience from a campfire.

When we go camping and sit around a campfire, we see light, not just from the surfaces of the wood in the fire, but from the inner heart of the embers themselves. When our hands are cold, we hold them up so that the infrared light from the fire warms them. Infra red light, from a glowing fire, is warmer than the yellow light when the first starts burning. We hold our hands up before the campfire until they are warm enough for blood within our fingers to be able to keep them warm. And so it is with love too.

Warmth from the embers, from the heart of the wood in the fire, does more than just help us to see, it warms our bodies and our souls. Sitting around a campfire, whether we are talking or not, creates another kind of warmth; the warmth of a community, whether we are talking about a scout troop or family members. When we are with friends or family we care about, being around each other warms our hearts and we feel connected to each other, and perhaps to God as well. In a few minutes we will share bread and grape juice. What makes it special is that we eat and drink them together; it is an experience we share. It reminds us of when Jesus was with his friends, eating and drinking together, because they loved each other.

When Jesus was speaking about light, the kind of light he was talking about was not like the cold light of a flashlight; it was more like the kind of light we experience from a warm campfire when we are with friends. The kind of light Jesus was describing in our scripture was a warm light; the warm light of love; love that we experience through smiles, laughter, and caring for each other.

In most stories in the Bible, Jesus is kind. He shares love, not just with his family and friends, but with strangers too. People that meet him for the first time are surprised that he seems to know them completely, as if they have been friends for their entire lives. Jesus has this ability to look, not just at the surface of someone's face but to look into their very souls. When he does this, it's not like he has x-ray vision that allows him to see the bones in their heads, but more like the light of love, that illuminates their hearts. He sees with eyes of love that can also see into broken hearts and joy as well.

Jesus has a special kind of vision helps him to see the parts of people's bodies and souls that need healing. Jesus sees with the eyes of faith; eyes that see not just what some is right now, but everything that they can become. Good scout leaders do this too; they see each of you cub scouts as boys who will become good men.

That is the kind of caring love that Jesus is talking about, when he says "you are the light of the world. A city built on top of a hill can't be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and hide it under a basket. Instead they put it on a lampstand and it shines on all who are in the house." Let's break that down:

A city built on top of a hill can't be hidden. Think about buildings on the hills of San Francisco. The City is large and beautiful and we can even see it from the hills of El Cerrito. It can't be hidden, nor should it.

Now imagine a lamp. What would be the point of lighting a lamp and hiding it under a basket? If we light a candle or a lamp it is because we want to be able to see. The higher you hold up a candle or lamp, the further its light extends. Put your hands together and imagine you have a lamp you are holding in them. If you can, lean over and put the imaginary lamp underneath the pew by your feet first – hmm. Not a lot of light. Now put your hands up in the air and imagine the light shining from your lamp now. A strong lamp can light up an entire room.

But the point isn't just to have light so we can see. What we all want, down deep in our hearts is to be loved and to love other people. There's a special kind of light that comes from within us. As followers of Jesus, we call this the light of Christ. Close your eyes for a second and imagine

that you are glowing with the warm glow of a campfire, the warmth of love that starts within your heart and extends to those around you. That's what Jesus means when he says, "you are the light of the world."

Is there someone in your life who loves you or who you can remember loving you; or that you can remember loving? The warmth of that love fills your heart and extends out into the world. When you are filled with love like that, you are, what Jesus calls, "the light of the world" – not like the cold light of a flashlight on a cold night, but the warm, glowing light of love.

That's the kind of love that the scout oath talks about when it says, "to help other people at all times." Have some of you helped a brother or sister when they fell down? Have some of you sat quietly with someone when they felt sad?

How about scouting for food? When you collect food for people that need it, that's a Jesus kind of love, because Jesus always helped poor and hungry people. He fed them, sometimes lots of them – one time 4000 and another time, 5000 people. That's a whole lot of love.

How many of you have flown on a plane? During the safety announcements, the flight attendant always says, "if you are traveling with a small child, put your mask on first, then put on the child's mask." Ever wonder why they say that? It's because if you are traveling with a small child and don't put on your own mask so you can breathe, you could fall unconscious and then neither you or the child would get oxygen. You put on your mask first, so you can stay alive and breathe and then quickly put the child's mask on them so they can breathe.

So it is important to take care of yourself too; to love yourself enough so you can be strong and help and love others. That's why the scout promise includes the words, "To keep myself physically strong, mentally awake and morally straight" – meaning, you need to take care of your body and mind, and do the right thing with other people, so that you have enough energy and love, to care for other people. You have to love and take care of yourself first, so that you will be able to care for and love others. That's not being selfish, it's what each of us need to do to take care of each other.

Most of my sermon has been about light, but the scripture the scouts read starts with a description about salt. A little bit of salt makes things taste good; it brings out flavor in chips, crackers, and other foods so that they taste better than they would without any salt. Taking care of yourself, getting enough sleep, studying regularly, exercising a little or a lot every day, making time for friends, praying and studying God's word, and having fun – all these are ways that you can keep your saltiness – which really means to keep yourself physically strong, mentally awake and morally straight.

When you have just a little bit of saltiness, you have energy, personality and are fun to be around. When you take care of yourself, you can take care of and care for more people.

Put your hands together and imagine you are holding a lamp. Lift that light up high into the world. Now say, "I am the light of the world." Say it again, "I am the light of the world." That's not bragging, because you see, the light that shines within you, is not just your light. It is the

light of Christ. The light of Christ that shines brightly within you when you love and care for others; when you serve others and are helpful to other people. Look around you. You are surrounded by and filled with the light of Christ. When you leave today, take that light with you, out into the world so that everyone can experience it. Amen.

**Matthew 5:13-20**

“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. “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 Father in heaven.

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.