

Natalie W. Bell
 August 11, 2019
 Ministry Appreciation

Let Your Light Shine
Matthew 5: 14-16

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ 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.

I cannot preach today,
 without mentioning the ***crisis of hatred*** in our country.
 I was shocked to learn that the Dayton, Ohio shooting had been the
255th mass shooting in 2019---just this year!
In each incident, at least 4 people were killed.
<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/mass-shootings-2019>
That's heartbreaking.

As I prayed and cried this week,
 And thought about this scripture---
 I realized, this is a ***very important time to be letting our light shine***, isn't it?
 In a world in crisis? A crisis of ***hate, prejudice, and white supremacy?***

And I realize light IS shining.
There's some exciting light shining in our denomination!
 Our new General Presbyter, Rev. Tim Blodgett recently wrote about his time
 at the PCUSA Big Tent conference in Baltimore, Maryland,
 and how amazing it was for him to realize
 that ***many of our denominational leaders are now people of color***,
 including our past Co-Moderator Denise Anderson,
 our current Co-Moderator , Elder Vilmarie Cintrón-Olivieri,
 our Stated Clerk, J. Herbert Nelson,
 and many other leaders across the church.
 Tim also noticed ***a change in age***—with more and more young people
 leading. Tim himself is one of several new General Presbyters who are
 young—he's 40 years old.

I read a couple of *Christian magazines* regularly—
 both *Christianity Today*, that comes from a more evangelical background,
 and *Christian Century*, that is a bit more socially progressive.
 They are both excellent, and of course,
 they **both addressed** the gun violence and hatred this week.

I was most touched by a *Christianity Today* article entitled, “*Jesus, Deliver Us From this Racist Evil Age*” by Jarvis J. Williams and Curtis A. Woods.
 This article is about how the gospel of Jesus
 is the complete antithesis to white supremacy.

The opening line broke my heart:
*On August 3, 2019, a shooter entered a Walmart shopping center in El Paso, Texas, and murdered 22 **image-bearers** and injured dozens of others....*

Did you catch that **phrase in the middle**?
 That’s what really hurt my heart.
 He murdered **22 “image-bearers”**.
 Bearers of **whose** image? **God’s**.

Isn’t that powerful? They were human beings, **made in the image of God**.
 Do we consider other people, who do not look, or act, or talk like us—
 do we consider ‘those people’, the ‘others’, **to be image bearers**?
 Because that is our calling as Christ followers.

NOT seeing every person this way
 is central to **understanding the history of hatred and violence**
 against entire groups of people.
 It happens when they are **reduced to someone and something strange,**
inferior, other, less than human, outside the ‘norm’, whatever that is.

In our Constitutional PCUSA **Book of Confessions**,
 we have two Confessions that specifically address racism and hatred:
 The **Barmen Declaration**, which was in response to the German Christian
 Movement, the churches that ultimately supported the Nazis.

And, we have **The Confession of Belhar**,
 which was written in response to apartheid,
 a movement sadly supported by many churches in South Africa.

Both Nazism and apartheid ***appealed to scripture*** to support their hatred.

Our Confessions of Barmen and Belhar use the ***whole of scripture*** and the ***life of Jesus*** Christ, to proclaim the truth—that ***all people are God's children, image-bearers!***

The question is, ***do we shine that light in the world as well?***
As individuals? As a church?

Isn't that ***part of what we are called to do*** in this day and age?
To see image bearers---
By ***TAKING the light of Christ*** into the world?
By ***BEING*** the light of Christ in the world?

And isn't it interesting that Jesus says to his followers in this Matthew 5 Sermon on the Mount,
You ***ARE the light*** of the world.
He ***doesn't*** say you ***CAN*** be, or you ***WILL*** be, he says you ***ARE***.
That doesn't sound optional, does it?

And it sounds like ***a tall order***, right?
Just like almost everything that Jesus calls us to do and say.
It's not the easy path in life,
The road to the kingdom of God is narrow, and harder to enter.

But with God—what is possible? All things!
That's right—with God, ALL things are possible!

And really, it's ***God's grace and power that enables us to BE the light of the world!***
We don't have to conjure up feelings about it,
We don't have to do it all on our own.
We just do it,
Asking for God's help to be the people we are called to be!

Today we remember that ***we are ALL the light of the world—***
We all have a ***part to play in the Body*** of Christ,
and all of us are called to work towards for the ***good of the Body,***
and the ***good of the world!***

Presbyterians have long looked to 1 Peter 2: 9, which says:
*But you are a chosen race, a royal **priesthood**, a holy nation, God's own people,^[c] in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of **darkness into his marvelous light**.*

the Greek word *genos*, for race, comes from the **root for 'kin'**.

It says, we are **a chosen kindred, we are a big chosen family!**

And we are all **'priests'**,

people who lead others in the worship of God.

Called—where?

Out of the darkness, and **into Jesus' marvelous LIGHT!**

This is why many churches refer to all the members as **'ministers'**—

Just like it says on the back of your bulletin today!

Because we all have a part to play, **everyone has a 'ministry'!**

In our denomination, we are **all ministers**,

and I am just *a Minister of Word and Sacrament*.

So, today is not just Volunteer Appreciation—it is **Minister Appreciation**—
 because we are **honoring the ministry** of each and every one of you!

We ALL welcome the light of Christ into this place,

SO THAT we can take that light of Christ out of here, and into the world!

Did you notice that we are called light of the **WORLD**,

Not light of the CHURCH?

It reminds me of Archbishop William Temple, who wisely said,

*the church is the **only organization that exists***

for those who are NOT members!

We ARE called to shine IN the church,

So that, we can **shine OUTSIDE it---**

We recognize that every single one of you

is **shining a light somewhere** out in the world,

whether it be at work, school, community, or even in your own home.

You are each one, ministers, the light of Christ in the world!

Where are you shining that light of Christ these days?

Where could you be shining?

Each one of us has a ***circle of influence***.
 We each have people who pay attention to what we say and do, right?
 So how are you shining Christ's light?

Because we have ***a calling---to make our faith visible---***
 in our ***words, and deeds***.
 We ***should not, we cannot***, hide it!
 There is actually ***no such thing as a 'closet' Christian!***

And think about this ---***What does light do?***
 Light reveals the ***truth***,
 Because it uncovers what has been in the darkness.
 Light bring new ***understanding***, it can bring new ***life***,
 Light can bring ***joy***, right?
 The Gospel of ***John*** begins with Jesus as the Word and the ***Light***.
 Jesus calls himself ***Light of the World***.

Light is a great metaphor for our lives as Christians.
 It's how we fulfill the ***Greatest Commandment*** in Matthew 22,
 To love God and neighbor as ourselves.

This is how we shine our light----***by loving God and neighbor***,
 And doing it ***publicly***.
For others to see.

Why?
 So that they might see how we talk and live, and ***give glory*** to God!
 So that they might see our faith, and ***want that faith!***

Having that ***circle of influence***,
 Is like the ***lamp on a lampstand***,
 to give off even more light!

And the truth is, each of us is a ***public figure***, whether we want to be or not.
 We live in the world of ***Facebook and Twitter and Instagram***.
 And we are surrounded by ***paparazzi***, because everyone has a camera—
 and they are ***watching*** everything we say and do!

So, how are we doing as lights in the world?
 Are we lighting up the world, with the ***love and grace of Jesus*** Christ?

Are we showing our Christian faith, in all that ***we say and do?***
 Do other people ***know*** that we are people of faith?
 How do we ***treat*** people?
 Do we show ***love and respect?***
 Do we ***forgive and offer grace?***
 How well do we ***listen?***
 How do we ***stand up for those*** who are weak, powerless, marginalized?

Do we treat EVERYONE as an image-bearer?

Do we ***reach out***, even to those who are different?
 Do we ***stand up*** when others are being hurt, excluded, or mistreated?

All throughout the Bible, starting in the Old Testament,
 God's people are encouraged to care
especially for the widow, the orphan, and the alien, or stranger.

Today, in 2019, that means we are called by God to care especially,
 for the widows, the orphans, and the immigrants.
 For men, women, and children who may not be from here, but who are here.

Why?

Because God's people were once the strangers, aliens, immigrants.

"You shall not wrong nor oppress the stranger, for you were strangers in the
 Land of Egypt" (Exodus 22:20).

"The strangers who reside with you shall be to you as your citizens ... for you
 were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Leviticus 19:34).

"For your God...upholds the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves
 the stranger, providing food and clothing — you too must love the stranger,
 for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Deuteronomy 10:18-19).

***We are called to care for all people, especially those who are different,
 left out, or marginalized.***

Not just from the Old Testament, but also from the ***life of Jesus***,
 who called women to accompany him in ministry,
 and made them the first preachers!

Jesus, who ate with sinners, and prostitutes,
 who touched lepers, called tax collectors,
 and ***welcomed every single kind of person you can imagine.***

It is not a stretch to say that ***Jesus would welcome anyone*** into this church if He were here today.

No matter the color of their skin, their ethnicity, their name, their ability, their gender, their identity, or their background.

Sure, this upsets our sense of order, it doesn't always make sense, But it IS the way of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Why did Jesus welcome all people?

Isn't it because ***all people are image-bearers?***

Didn't he love all, ***because we are all children*** of God?

Jesus ***did NOT condone the hatred or prejudice*** of society or the religious authorities of his day, and he would ***certainly not condone any hatred or prejudice today.*** When we stand up for those who are different or oppressed, We are standing up with Jesus.

Sometimes that standing up starts right in our own families.

For each of us is a minister, even in our home.

How are you shining the light of Christ there—in your own home and family?

A few years ago, someone asked famous Presbyterian Pastor and author of *The Message*, ***Eugene Peterson, what he would say if he knew it would be his last sermon.*** Peterson replied, *"I think I would want to talk about things that are immediate and ordinary. In the kind of world we live in, the primary way that I can get people to be aware of God is to say, 'Who are you going to have breakfast with tomorrow, and how are you going to treat that person?' In my last sermon, I guess I'd want to say, 'Go home and be good to your spouse. Treat your children with respect. Do a good job at work.'*

Rev. Scott Hoezee, in his sermon, "All Righteousness, All the Time", Day 1, 2017

It makes me think of my dad's brother, ***my Uncle Al.***

He's 84 years old, and has been spending time ***making videos*** for all the generations of his family that will come after him—

He's ***telling stories*** of growing up on the dairy farm, of family legends, but also of his ***faith journey as a Christian,***

and his desire that all the generations of his family would come to know Jesus.

Isn't that amazing?
I can't imagine how special those videos will be for years to come!

But even more important is who he is.
***A man of faith, he truly sees the image of God,
In all the people he meets.***

Do we ***see image-bearers*** all around us?
Isn't this ***why we participated*** in the OpenTable Café—a place for all people
to be fed, no matter who they are?
and the Youth Café—a safe space for all youth to be welcomed and fed?
It's what's behind our missions to Meals on Wheels, Malawi, OCR, and EIS!
We ***see the image of God*** in all people,
And we ***shine the light of Christ!***

We may be ***surrounded by a world in crisis.***
We might turn on news and see ***stories of hatred*** and prejudice.
But our ***lives can be full of light and goodness,***
Of grace, and mercy, of loving God and neighbor—
inside and outside the church.

Our lives can be lived ***as members of the Body*** of Christ,
each with a special and essential part to play in here, and out there.
We can be ***light---in a world*** that desperately needs light.

That is the ***Good News of our Gospel*** today,
We are all called-
To let the light of Christ in us, shine!
Shine, for all the world to see!
And to that, all God's people say, Amen.