

Matthew 5:13-20

5th Sunday after Epiphany

Feb. 8, 1987

You are the light of the world.

I always wanted to be the beacon in a lighthouse on a stormy night. Ships out on the rough waters in danger of crashing on the rocks, would see my light piercing through the rain and the fog. All through the night I would shine bright and clear and many would give thanks to me.

You are the light of the world.

I want to be the flashlight, making visible all that is unseen in the darkness. <sup>From</sup> my beam, rats and other creatures of the darkness flee away to hide. The path is made safe to travel through the night to the dawn of the new day.

You are the light of the world.

I want to be like sunlight, making all visible. In the presence of sunlight there is no darkness, no deeds that are not revealed. Where the sun shines there is growth and warmth and life. I want to be like sunlight.

You are the light of the world.

You have come together to be a part of the church in a place called Kenton. You have come together, drawn here by what you will receive from our Lord Jesus Christ. With fears, with disappointments, with hopes and dreams you have responded to the invitation to come. Yet it is not only to receive that you have come, but also to give. You too have wanted to be so filled by God that you will be a light before others, that lighthouse beacon, that will lessen the tragedy of human life crashing upon the rocks. Or maybe you have wanted to be that light that will make the way safe for others to travel through the night of this world. Or possibly, you are one who gives, and with your gifts you shine like the sun for others, giving food, and warmth and love.

You are the light of the world.

Now I don't know how it is for you, but though I began thinking I would be a light, ~~but~~ just as Jesus said, now I'm afraid there must be a short in

the switch. Or a defective lightbulb. O, sometimes I glow with warmth and love, ~~maybexsometims~~ but at othertimes in anger or weariness or selfishness no light comes from me at all. Or at other times though I give and give of myself, burning as brightly as I possibly can, the darkness is so thick that my light seems to make no difference at all.

You are the light of the world, Jesus said. But I ask myself, am I really? Am I the light Jesus was talking about? He said, "Let your light so shine before ~~manx~~ men that they ~~andx~~ may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." Has it happened? Have people seen my deeds, your deeds and thanked God for what he has done? Or have they simply thanked us ~~Emxke~~ for being nice people?

One morning, nearly seven years ago I found myself sitting in my garage in my pajamas at six or six-thirty in the morning. No, I was not sleep walking. I was smoking my first cigarette of the day. The doctor had said that our baby, Katie, was allergic to smoke, so my smoking had to be done outside the house.

That morning I was in a panic. In four hours I would be conducting the funeral for Marge Erickson. She was one of the pillars of the church, a woman of deep faith and devotion. Though she had no children of her own, for more than forty years she had been a teacher of children in our Sunday School. Though I did not know it as I sat in the garage that morning, at her funeral I would see people whom I would never see at another funeral, outcasts in the community who never felt welcome in the church, but ~~farxMarge~~ in honor of Marge they would come.

Why the panic? I had no sermon prepared. I had sat at my typewriter for two days, but nothing would come. What would I say to ~~ten~~<sup>ten 300</sup> hundred people in a few hours?

~~I sat~~<sup>I</sup> up, and looked out the row of windows across the garage door. Across the street, in the Chinese elm trees suddenly there were dancing orange lights, Like tiny stars flashing, ~~dancing~~<sup>twinkly</sup>. At first I thought that my eyes were deceiving me, or that I was having some sort of vision. I wandered if anyone had ever

witnessed such a ~~thing~~<sup>thing</sup> before. As I watched, very slowly the lights became brighter, whiter.

And suddenly I knew what I was seeing, and what I would preach.

This morning when the sun came up, I told the congregation, ice crystals in the trees reflected its light, like thousands of bulbs twinkling and flashing. Marge who has lived among us has for all of these years been like one of those ice crystals. Her Lord, Jesus Christ is the sunshine, and as we have looked at her and seen her works, we have been seeing his light reflected. His love, his forgiveness, his mercy, ~~have come~~<sup>have come</sup> coming to us through her.

You are the light of the world, Jesus says to us. Yet he is the light, not we. He is the beacon that pierces the darkness, guiding ships over troubled seas, he is the light driving away the creatures of darkness, he is the sunlight bringing life and warmth and growth. He is the light that ~~was~~ when people are blessed to see it they fall on their knees in thanks to God.

And we are ice crystals, like mirrors, reflecting him. As people see the sparkle, they may be fooled for a time, as I was fooled in my garage. They may praise us for our kindness, our goodness, as people would praise Marge. But in time they will recognize that it is not we who are the source of the light, that we are but reflecting what we have received, and they will give thanks to God for the light that is Jesus Christ.

A final ~~few~~ thought: On that morning, seven years ago, had it been but one ice crystal reflecting, I doubt that I would have even taken notice. And so it may seem as we each of us, individually and alone ~~seek~~ reflect our Lord. But as I witnessed thousands of lights twinkling in the early morning light, I was drawn to them.

You are but a few, here in Kenton, and we in Avon Lake, but a few. When we look at the darkness, and our small twinkling light we wonder how it could make any difference. But in Kenton and Avon Lake and in every place that Jesus is proclaimed as Lord, as our words and lives reflect the light who is our Lord, more and more will see, and be drawn to him. ~~and the light will~~  
*and God will be praised.*