



LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE

Rev. Jefferson M. Furtado — Sunday, June 14, 2024

Matthew 5:16b: In the same way, let your light shine before people, so they can see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven. (CEB)

Philippians 2:14-16: Do everything without grumbling and arguing so that you may be blameless and pure, innocent children of God surrounded by people who are crooked and corrupt. Among these people you shine like stars in the world because you hold on to the word of life. This will allow me to say on the day of Christ that I haven't run for nothing or worked for nothing. (CEB)

Please Pray with me:

Oh God, whose mind is beyond our comprehension,

whose grace is often beyond our perception,

whose love is not phased by our rejection,

and whose forgiveness is much greater than our guilt and sin.

We place ourselves before your graceful gaze, and seek the wisdom of your Holy Spirit as we seek to engage with your Holy Scriptures, so that we may be transformed and grow into the people you have created and called us to be.

In Christ, we pray. Amen.

Last week in our sermon, we explored Jesus' teachings from the Sermon on the Mount, where he challenged his followers to embrace a new perspective empowered by the reality of the incarnation—God with us, through the person of Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. The focus for us, centered on Matthew 5:16b, where Jesus instructs his followers, “let your light shine before people, so they can see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven.”

These words of Jesus are pivotal for us, as a community of faith, because they guide the ongoing work we are called to do—individually as God's children and collectively as a community of faith. So, we heard the words of Jesus, "Let your light shine..." and wondered together what it means to shine our light. Should we shine our light in secrecy? Behind closed doors? As secret agents for Jesus? No, Jesus calls us to shine our light openly before others. This directive reminds us that we do not live for ourselves but we exist for a greater purpose. Our actions are meant to reveal God's transformative work in and through us. Our actions can be a catalyst for God to move, renew, transform, and redeem those we cherish, those who challenge us, and even those we struggle to understand—accept or love.

Therefore, since this light is not of ourselves but from God, when we shine it outward, we point others to the divine source of all goodness and grace. We become vessels through which God's love, hope, and mercy are made visible in the world. This means we must live our faith openly and authentically, allowing God's light to illuminate the

darkest corners of our communities and relationships. It means we practice acts of kindness, justice, and compassion, and seek to reflect the character of Christ in every interaction.

But how in the world do we do that? I guess that might be the million dollar question for us. The words of the Apostle Paul in Philippians 2:14-16 informs how one is to go forward in this work.

So, hear these words from Philippians 2:14-16: *Do everything without grumbling and arguing so that you may be blameless and pure, innocent children of God surrounded by people who are crooked and corrupt. Among these people you shine like stars in the world because you hold on to the word of life. This will allow me to say on the day of Christ that I haven't run for nothing or worked for nothing. (CEB)*

The word of God, for us, the people of God. **Thanks be to God.**

A few years ago, during an All Church Retreat at Beersheba Spring Assembly, excitement buzzed through the air as many of the church's kids eagerly signed up for the talent show. As a parent, you might relate to that mix of anticipation and curiosity when you see your child's name on a signup sheet, unsure of what they've planned to showcase. Along with other parents, Linda and I sat nervously as each child—including two of ours—took the stage to reveal their talents.

As the presentations unfolded, I was surprised to see the child of one of our friends with a guitar. I turned to their parents beside me and asked, "Is your child pretty good?" Without missing a beat, the parent responded with a confident smile, "No, my child is filled with confidence." He continued, "I don't really know about talent, but the children in our family are full of confidence."

It is hard to speak about the Apostle Paul without noting his confidence both in the power of the Holy Spirit at work in him and I suspect his confidence in himself.

Now, let me begin by acknowledging that I have a complicated relationship with the Apostle Paul—and I imagine many of us might share that sentiment. The Apostle Paul is one of the most shining examples of faith the New Testament offers us (*I have a lot of jokes about why Paul was necessary, but we will save that for other sermons, and fair warning, none of my kids think they are funny*). Paul, in Philippians 3 describes himself as a Hebrew born of Hebrews; a person of the tribe of Benjamin; a Pharisee by training; a zealous persecutor of the church; a righteous person and blameless under the law. He had an impeccable resume and was an ascending leader in his community. But despite his deep confidence in himself and his own righteousness, Paul found himself knocked off his feet (Acts 9) and had a deep crisis of faith. After being knocked off his feet, Paul had to deal with the reality that all his education, preparation, and zeal was not enough for him to deal with the upside down reality of God's kingdom. Paul needed somebody to serve as a guide and light during his time of physical and spiritual blindness. The role of guide was not insignificant, that person had to be willing to come face-to-face with one he did not trust.

As he gained new sight and moved forward into the life of faith, Paul continued to display the deep confidence he previously had, not simply because of his training, energy, or even social status as a Greek citizen, but because he understood that something different had happened in his life. Paul had experienced a deep transformation and had access to a power beyond his own. Paul moved in the world as if wearing a t-shirt, like one my wife often wears, saying “Know your worth and add tax.” After having spent time doing some of the worst things one can do to others—rob them of their freedom and suppress their faith—Paul gained a deep understanding of what it meant to allow one’s action to shine before people—no matter the circumstances.

Paul’s letter to the Philippians was written from prison. Philippi was a Roman colony in the province of Macedonia. And while in prison Paul wrote to encourage that community by saying, “what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the gospel” (Philippians 1:12b). He expresses deep gratitude for their support of his ministry, and calls them to continue to be faithful, and “stand firm, united in one spirit and mind” (Philippians 1:27b) as they struggled together to remain faithful to the gospel.

Understanding that Paul is writing from prison, gives a new meaning to hearing his self description of “prisoner of the Lord.” He is telling the Philippians and all of us that no life circumstance can be too great that should prevent us from proclaiming the Gospel. Unlike with other letters, Paul is not addressing the Philippians because they find themselves in trouble or in conflict. He simply writes as pastor and friend to give witness to what is doing in his own life and, as I mentioned, to encourage them in the faith.

Paul encourages them in their faith and calls them to shine the light of God in the world by doing “everything without grumbling and arguing.” I don’t know about you, but for me that seems like a tall order. I wonder if the people of Philippi wrote him back and said, “Brother Paul, we received your letter with great gladness, and know the Lord will deliver you. But we were talking and we now have a few questions... When you said, ‘do everything...’ Do you really mean everything?” If you have already arrived at perfection, help me out, but **everything** is tough. And yet, he calls them to do it. To live in a way that allows them to stand out in their social environment.

Paul reminds us that our attitudes, actions, and practices matter. We are a people on our way to perfection, that’s the ultimate goal, but until we get there, the invitation to allow our lives to offer glimpses of the beautiful work that is enfolding within us. In a world of “fake it until you make it,” it can be a challenge to accept the fact that our lives are not as perfect, fun, polished, and all together as our friend’s social media feed portrays their lives to be. While the online and social media world opened lots of new opportunities for people, it also created a culture of manufactured reality. But the problem with creating an illusion of self for others, is that we must continue to live

with the reality of who we are by ourselves. In a world of hyper connectivity we have an epidemic of loneliness, and perhaps that's because we have been "catfishing"¹ others and they show up and do not see the real us.

So, the goal for us is to live our **real** lives in such a way that the love and light of God are reflected even through the broken and yet redeemed reality we occupy. The call for us, at all times and in places, is to grow in the image of Christ, allowing Christ to shine through us, showing the world that even through times of difficulty we are people whose faith and trust are unshakable, not because we are better than others, but because we trust a God who stands with us through our joys and sorrows.

You know, it's appropriate to name the fact that Christ's invitation to shine our light out in the world can bring up a lot of feelings to our minds and hearts. You may be thinking, this all sounds fine, but I am an introvert, I don't know what to say, I am afraid to say the wrong thing, etc. But be encouraged friends, we cannot allow those things to stand in the way of our good deeds.

We must remember that it is through our everyday actions that others can see and experience God's love, grace, and presence. Whether it's through a simple act of kindness, a word of encouragement, or standing up for justice, each action becomes a testament to God's ongoing work in the world. I don't know if you are a fan of Ryan Reynolds' Deadpool franchise. But in the second movie one of the characters reminds him that it only takes four or five moments for somebody to become a hero. Four or five moments. The good news for us is that it may only take one moment, one action, one word for God's light to shine brightly in somebody's life.

What might that one moment be in your life?

Let us take Paul's words to heart. Let us do everything with the knowledge that through us, God's light can shine in a world that desperately needs the light of Christ. Let us live authentically, reflecting God's love, hope, and mercy in every interaction. And let us remember that through our actions, we have the power to reveal God's transformative love to a world in need.

Thanks be to God.

Amen

¹ In popular vernacular, catfishing is when someone sets up a fake online identity and uses it to trick or control others. Often they do it to scam people.