



# Lexington Presbyterian Church

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## Let Your Light Shine

Matthew 5:14-16 & Ephesians 2:10

A sermon by William M. Klein

9 February 2020

**10** For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before-hand to be our way of life. (Eph. 2:10 NRSV)

**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. (Mt. 5:14-16 NRSV)

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Have you ever had the privilege of watching a sculptor at work? Years ago I had an opportunity to watch one in action. Chris Hall was asked to carve the capitals of the columns surrounding the cloister of the Iona Abbey in Scotland. It never crossed his mind he would spend the next 30 years working off and on the project.

I have a vivid mental picture of Chris Hall seated on a stool precariously positioned between the columns – chisel in one hand and what I took to be a 3 pound hammer in the other. Chink, chink, chink went the sound hour after hour, day after day. As I moved from task to task, I planned my routes to see what images were appearing from within those plain capitals. Flowers, birds, grapevines, people, Celtic symbols...it was truly amazing to see what the sculptor would bring forth next from that amorphous sandstone.<sup>1</sup> What I saw only as a plain, smooth capital...Chris Hall, with the eye of a sculptor, saw as some image waiting to be given life.

The Sufi master, Hafiz, in one of his delightful poems talked about the master craftsman "sculpting light."<sup>2</sup> I love that image. It made me think of the first verses of the Bible that describe God sculpting light. God created the heavens and the earth. Darkness covered the earth and wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God created light. And God saw that the light was good.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told his listeners they were God's light. He did not mean the light originated from them. He meant they were lit by the light of God and so shone with the light of God. The more they permitted the light of God to shine upon and within them, the more others would see that light, find their lives lightened, and shine with God's light, as well.

I am told that somewhere on the Irish coast there are twin lighthouses, set about 500 feet apart on opposite sides of an estuary. There is a powerful light in one, but no light in the other, only prisms and reflectors that mirror the light from the first. Yet from a distance, both seem to shine equally. Just so our lives can reflect and mirror the light of Christ."<sup>3</sup>

2

"You are the light of the world." What a thought...you and I agents of God's goodness and light! God using us to sculpt light. God using our words, our deeds, our behavior to help those around us to shine with a brighter light.

1

I have a friend who says the baptismal service blows him away. The part of the service that blows him away blows me away too - and that is the vow we all take when a child is baptized. The vow is very similar when an adult is baptized. As a community, we agree (and I quote)...

*To tell this (person) the good news of the gospel, to help him or her know all that Christ commands, and by our fellowship, to strengthen his or her family ties with the household of God?*

That remarkable promise commits each of us to being involved in the lives of the people we baptize. This promise means we make the effort to know their names and that we greet them by name when we see them. It means we pray for them. It means we read the newspapers with an eye out for their accomplishments. It means we encourage and congratulate them...and that we correct them if and when they go astray. It means we take seriously the promise to help them learn about Christ and know Christ...a promise that may just lead us to help teach them about this faith we learned from someone who took the promise seriously and so taught us.

"You are the light of the world," said Jesus. And, of course, the opposite is true, isn't it? By hiding the light of Christ, by our timidity and fear...we inadvertently add to the net amount of darkness in the world.

You know by now that I cherish the works of Wendell Berry. He is a farmer, essayist, conservationist, novelist, teacher, and poet. He may not call himself a theologian...but I would. In a book about Berry, someone said his writings **make goodness compelling**.<sup>4</sup> What a marvelous thing to be able to say about someone...that he makes goodness compelling. He is so compelling because he is busy sculpting light with his words and his witness. Would that someone could say something such as this about you and me.

Berry thinks we are in the process of losing the capacity to see the good in things. He observes that our vision is shallow...that we are too impatient, too rushed, too glued to the 24 hour news cycle, or simply too clouded by self-interest. We do not prize the joy and glory that are perpetually before us, nor do we sufficiently taste the sweetness of this life.<sup>5</sup>

Because he has a sculptor's eye, Berry sees the goodness God has made. He sees that God has been busy sculpting light...and that God has been doing this for no other reason than for us to share in his delight.

3

I once heard someone ask a Bible study group, "Are you a 100 watt bulb, a 40 watt bulb, or a night light?" We laugh...but this is an insightful question.

Context matters. Not every context calls for the same amount of light. When something awakens you in the middle of the night and you stumble through the house, you need a night light. A 100 watt bulb in the middle of the night would not be helpful. When you are trying to read, though, a 100 watt bulb may be just what you need.

As light-bearers, we must read the context and decide what sort of witness is called for. Jim Wallis is a Christian writer, lecturer, and founder of a movement that goes by the name of *Sojourners*.<sup>6</sup> Addressing poverty and combating those attitudes and policies that contribute to poverty are at the heart of his Christian commitment. He does not shout or

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wave his arms to make his point. He has been arrested many times for simply standing alongside the poor and dispossessed...but his voice rarely modulates. He lets the biblical evidence speak loudly. He does this by pulling out a Bible that is literally riddled with holes. He made the holes. He clipped from the Bible every reference to poverty, hunger, and thirst...holds it up and says..."Look how much of the Bible we ignore when we ignore what our faith has to say about poverty and poor people." Jim Wallis' monotone voice may be a 60 watt light bulb...but when he holds up that holey Bible it shines with the light of the sun. I don't know how anyone can look at it without being moved...but some are not.

4

Listen once again to our gospel reading - this time from Eugene Peterson's translation known as *The Message*.

*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.<sup>7</sup>*

Friends, let the light of Christ shine in you and through you today and every day. Let the light Christ is sculpting of you shine in your faces and in the way you use your bodies and in the words you speak. Let the light of Christ shine through who you are in order that others may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. Let the light of Christ shine through you so that through you others may see the way out of their darkness. Amen.



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**Endnotes:**



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<sup>1</sup> See examples of the capitals prior to the “endnotes.” <http://www.chrishallsulptures.co.uk/commissions/iona-cloisters.htm>. The Iona Abbey Cloister carvings were commissioned by the Iona Community in 1967, and completed in 1997. The capitals depict variously plants and flowers of the Bible, flowers of Iona and of the British Isles, and birds of the West Highlands. The additional carvings, called Locks, illustrate the parables of Jesus Christ and also the offering of bread and wine.

<sup>2</sup> Ladinsky, Daniel. trans. 1999. *The Gift: Poems by Hafiz, the Great Sufi Master*. NY: Penguin Compass, 77. The poem is “The Vintage Man.”

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<sup>3</sup> Stauderman, Albert P. 1983. Let Me Illustrate. Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 114.

<sup>4</sup> Peters, Jason. ed. 2007. Wendell Berry: Life and Work. Lexington, KY: Univ. Press of Kentucky, xii. Quoting Stanley Hauerwas, who began his teaching career at Notre Dame, then was a longtime professor at Duke Divinity School, serving as Professor of Theological Ethics with a joint appointment at the Duke Law School. The fall of 2014 he assumed a chair in theological ethics at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland.

<sup>5</sup> Peters, 149. Quoting Wendell Berry.

<sup>6</sup> See [www.sojo.net](http://www.sojo.net). Wallis has several books. I am most familiar with these two: God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It, The Great Awakening: Reviving Faith and Politics in a Post-Religious Right America, and most recently, On God's Side: What Religion Forgets and Politics Hasn't Learned about Serving the Common Good. The magazine, *Sojourners*, was first published in 1971.

<sup>7</sup> Peterson, Eugene H. 2002. The Message. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1751.