

6.19.22 – Pentecost 2 & Father’s Day
“Are We Listening? Are We Light?”
The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Matthew 5:14-16 (NRSV) ~ Pam

¹⁴ You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵ People do not light a lamp and put it under the bushel basket; rather, they put it 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.

L: These are the Teaching Words of Christ. C: Thanks be to God!

Mark 4:21-25 (NLT) ~ Pam

Parable of the Lamp

²¹ Then Jesus asked them, “Would anyone light a lamp and then put it under a basket or under a bed? Of course not! A lamp is placed on a stand, where its light will shine. ²² For everything that is hidden will eventually be brought into the open, and every secret will be brought to light. ²³ Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.”

²⁴ Then he added, “Pay close attention to what you hear. The closer you listen, the more understanding you will be given—and you will receive even more. ²⁵ To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them.”

L: These are Directions from God! C: Thanks be to God.

Please pray with me:

Dear God, thank you for this day celebrating fathers and freedom for all. Speak to us through the parables of Jesus in a new way. Let us be obedient disciples this summer as we explore parables as a tool to hear your direction. Open our minds and hearts to see and hear your voice and direction through beautiful imagery and metaphor. Help us be attentive to the message you want each of us to hear, as you speak through my voice today. **“Amen.”**

Again, I say *Happy Father’s Day!* Even if you are not a dad so to speak, you have one, and you are probably a father figure to someone, so please enjoy this day. We cannot forget the significance of Juneteenth either. This may not be an important milestone in your personal history, but it is an important recognition for us as citizens. In Galveston, Texas, the home of Juneteenth, residents began to mark the day in 1865 when members of the Union Army arrived in Texas to both inform enslaved

people that they were now entitled to a wage for their labor, and to enforce the **Emancipation Proclamation** of 1863 among slaveholders. Black people led celebrations for this holiday since it began, but last year President Biden signed into law a federal holiday to commemorate this freedom. “Juneteenth is a moment to think about freedom being conditional freedom and it is something that we must continuously strive and fight for. (NBC News, Michelle Garcia: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/mean-celebrate-juneteenth-rcna33322>.)”

Our freedom through Jesus Christ is one we study in today’s parables. Let’s jump on in, and perhaps you can draw your own conclusions about freedom and Father’s Day as it relates to the light of Christ. Matthew 5 as you may recall is the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus teaches his disciples the Beatitudes to show them how they should live their lives. Then in our passage, he shares how they can influence the world through their perspective, beliefs, and actions.

Think about it: lights are meant to shine into darkness to see something. People who have light within radiate God’s light and love for others to see his power, goodness, and love. That’s why one puts a light high up on a stand to shine, and not under a bed or bowl. The rabbis often called God, Israel, and Torah the “light of the world,” and even called David “the lamp of Israel.” And we read in John 8:12, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” Light is a natural phenomenon from the sun and can also be a figure of speech. The light in Matthew 5:14-16 represents an intimate spiritual relationship with God. Jesus has told them first in the Beatitudes how to build better character personally and now teaches them through

metaphor how their good deeds (the fruit of that good character) will shine for others to see, and they will believe and praise the heavenly Father. It is an evangelistic training session for them and for us.

In the Mark passage, Jesus is clearly not trying to hide meaning through the parables, rather, he wants to shine light on his teaching with **boldness**, to put it on a lampstand and not hidden under a bowl. Why would one even place an oil lamp under a bowl? This was only done at night just like we use nightlights (a dimmer light) to shine our way down a hallway or to ease a child's fears of the dark. Did you know that the King James Version uses the words "candles" and "candlesticks" instead of "lamps" and "lampstands" in its translation? When KJV was written in 1611, the lights typically used in homes were large central fireplaces, candles, rush lights, flaming torches or lanterns. But in first century Palestine, lighting was provided by small olive-oil lamps from a goatskin oil container or a hand-held small pottery oil lantern. Candles were available earlier, but because they were made of animal fat, only the wealthy could afford them, and did not come into popular usage until the 1850's with whaling. That's your trivia for today! If you enjoy learning the social and cultural history of our Scriptures or want to see pictures, commentaries and internet research are helpful.

Jesus is using metaphor to help the disciples understand that they must listen with full minds and hearts, and not just ears. In Mark 4:24, he wants them to pay attention to his words, and to feel his words and future teachings as if a high lampstand were shining down brightly on his instruction. This is why our theme is "Listen for the Work," this year. Believers are responsible to use well their God-given understanding. Like

fathers or father figures who teach their children or other children about life. This intergenerational wisdom is so important. That's how faith and spiritual disciplines are learned; children catch more from behaviors and examples than from lectures or sermons! Mark felt that Christ's teachings were for all, not just the disciples. So, he spoke clearly and concisely.

And wrote it down for us! Why do we use porch lights or flood lights around a building? We might use them for security and safety – to let potential intruders know there are people at home with a security system. Or another reason is to illuminate the path to the door or driveway, sidewalk, or stairs. If my porch light isn't on by 5 pm in the winter, I cannot see to insert my key into the lock! A third reason for lights (if you think about a hotel situation) is for hospitality. Lights make people feel welcomed. As a church here at night there are pockets of darkness, but we are gradually working on that to light up our little corner of Annandale! Even those who don't know God gain some comfort from an open, well-lit church; there is cultural and spiritual comfort in our presence even for non-believers. Church, though criticized by many, is still a symbol of hope for others.

In the theatre district during pandemic, a “ghost-light” remained lit on every stage of Broadway, even when the theatre was closed. Now their light was based on superstition, but from what I heard during the Tony Awards, during COVID, the light kept hope alive, and for many it was a spiritual connection to a greater Creator God who would heal us. And so, with us—does our welcoming presence mean people will be here on Sundays? Not necessarily in today's climate. It does mean, however, that they can possibly turn to God toward the light and away from evil and

darkness because the light represents His love, his hope for the world, and the Holy Spirit living in us believers who joyfully pay the bills of those lights because of our higher purpose to spread the Gospel. We can radiate his light if we walk in it and bathe in His word and presence daily. We share that light in our daily lives, not just Sundays.

Mark is calling the disciples and ourselves to share this light conspicuously, to share the good news (Gospel) with everyone we encounter. If you don't feel comfortable doing that, then we need to chat. If you spend time with the Father, He will empower your words and walk to be light in this world of darkness. Do not lose hope watching the news. Instead, dig deeper into your spiritual study and prayer. The light shines through us: "Your eye is like a lamp that provides light for your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is filled with light (Matt. 6:22 ^{NLT})."

You men today may already have done that or are doing it, so I encourage you to continue that teaching or action that reflects Creator God. You influence more people than you realize. Find connections to be the light to other generations, just through your presence. This week, here are your homework instructions again:

After the sermon of each week, please go back and re-read the parable all week long. Day 1, read with the mind for facts and to recall the story. Day 2, read it aloud. Day 3, create a play out of it – set the scene, smell the environment, hear the voices, eat the food in your mind, and walk the paths. Day 4, if there is one, select the character you relate to in the story and become him or her, as you read it again. Day 5, ask heart questions: how did the main character feel? Was he afraid, grateful, sorrowful, kind? Day 6, ask yourself: what is God saying to me through

this parable? Is it about the work of the church or is it a private message? And write down your insights! They are the still small voice of God for you alone. The last verses of today's passage assure us there will be reward for this challenging work of shining the light of God's truth, both here and eternally. What are you waiting for? Don't **you** want those rewards? Amen. //

Will you pray with me? God, you are light in this dark world. Shine on us today and forever. May we share Christ's story with others and know that you oversee the results. We thank you for imaginative ways to do that in your parables, as we also listen for your direction through the words of Scripture and our quiet prayer times. May we go from here with a desire to learn new meaning from Jesus' familiar parables. Let your light shine through us this week. **Amen.**