

A Sermon Preached by Rev. Gregory Hall at Clarence Presbyterian Church on September 5, 2021.

SENDING

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. John 17:17-18

Today we conclude our summer focus on worship. In light of the Covid restrictions on worship, we have been exploring the meaning and purpose of worship. We have made some changes to our worship that can help us experience the presence of God in deeper ways.

Worship ends with what our Book of Common Worship calls "Sending." We are told:

Christian worship and service does not end at the conclusion of the Service for the Lord's Day; we go forth to love and serve the Lord in daily living.

The last section of worship called Sending includes, a hymn, a charge and blessing which prepare us to go out into the world to serve Christ. We are to take the love we have experienced in worship into the world. The symbol for this is light.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus makes an extraordinary claim. He says that You and I are the light of the world. In these words, Jesus is reminding us that God has called us for a purpose. Our faith is not merely for our private benefit, but rather the love God has for us is to be shared with the world.

The light we have comes not from us but is given to us by Jesus. We are called to shine with a reflection of Jesus. How then are we to be lights in the world?

Some people become light in sharing the Gospel through words.

Henrietta Mears was born in the Midwest in 1891. Her first career was in education She taught for sixteen years in two high schools in Minnesota. Mears taught everything from chemistry to drama. She was a born teacher. Yet she was a committed Christian and sought to share the good news of Jesus using the skills she had been given.

Thus in 1928 she accepted an offer to become the Christian educator at Hollywood Presbyterian Church in California. This was a position that she would hold for more than thirty years. In that position she was able to use her skills as a teacher and organizer to influence generations of Christian leaders.

She did not like the curriculums available for Sunday School or Vacation Bible School, so she wrote her own and created a publishing company called Gospel Light that is still in business today.

In 1938 Miss Mears established Forest Home Conference Center for young people to learn the Bible in a beautiful setting. During the 1940's a young man by the name of Billy Graham came to seek advice from Miss Mears. She sent him to Forest Home for a time of reflection. It was at Forest Home that Graham gained clarity of vision for his future ministry. This center sponsored by Hollywood Presbyterian Church continues to inspire people today.

She taught a class for college age students and inspired many of them to enter the ministry in the Presbyterian Church. In those days only males could be considered for the ministry. They became known as Miss Mear's boys. She would encourage talented young people to seek full time Christian service. She would often find the money for their education. One of her boy's was a young businessman named Bill Bright.

Through Miss Mears' encouragement and prodding Bill Bright founded an organization that became known as Campus Crusade for Christ. In the past sixty years more than 3 billion people around the world have heard the Gospel in one way or another through the work of Campus Crusade. All of this was made possible by a single Sunday school teacher who let her light shine.

Others serve as lights in the worlds by holding fast to the light of truth.

Elijah Lovejoy was born in Maine in 1802. Following his graduation from what is now Colby College he, like many young men of his day, went west seeking a new future. He settled in St. Louis and became editor of a newspaper.

During this time, he had a profound conversion experience and joined First Presbyterian Church. His deepening faith led him to become involved in the burning public issues of his day, especially the issue of slavery. He began to argue in print for emancipation. This caused an angry mob to damage his printing press.

Lovejoy decided to leave St. Louis and move to a free State. He settled in Alton Illinois. There he believed that he could exercise his right to free expression granted to him by God, through natural law and under the First Amendment to the Constitution.

Unfortunately, the hostility followed Lovejoy to his new community. He continued to publish his views, which attracted opposition. Mobs destroyed two new presses. Then on November 7, 1837 yet another hostile crowd gathered bent on breaking a new printing press. Lovejoy and a friend attempted to prevent

the mob from setting his warehouse on fire. Lovejoy was shot and died on the spot. Some historians suggest that America entered a new phase of the debate over slavery at this time. It was a shot that would lead to the Civil War.

Lovejoy is an example of a person seeking to live out his faith in the world. He did not hide his light under a bushel but stood up for truth in the public square.

Others become lights in the world by demonstrating the love for those in need.

In the last century the most famous Christian might well have been Mother Teresa. She was the Albanian nun who went to India to serve the poorest of the poor. In serving she discovered that it is not economic poverty but the poverty of love that caused the greatest pain.

One of the people who brought Mother Teresa to the attention the world was Malcom Muggeridge. In his book *Something Beautiful for God*, Muggeridge describes the work of Mother Teresa and her Sisters' work in India. I believe his words are a model for letting one's light shine today. He writes:

The biggest disease today is not leprosy or tuberculosis, but rather the feeling of being unwanted, uncared for and deserted by everybody. The greatest evil is the lack of love and charity, the terrible indifference towards one's neighbor who lives at the roadside assaulted by exploitation, corruption, poverty and disease.

As each one of this Society is to become a Co-Worker of Christ in the slums, each ought to understand what God and the Society expect from her. Let Christ radiate and live his life in her and through her in the slums. Let the poor seeing her be drawn to Christ and invite him to enter their homes and their lives. Let the sick and suffering find in her a real angel of comfort and consolation, let the little ones of the streets cling to her because she reminds them of him, the friend of little ones.

The light of Christ shines from Mother Teresa's example till today.

You and I do not have to be as dramatic as Henrietta Mears
Or Elijah Lovejoy
Or Mother Teresa.

But each of us in our own way can let our light shine.

We can tell the story of God's love.

We can stand for truth.

We can serve those in need.

The Book of Common Worship tells us:

The Service for the Lord's Day concludes with a blessing in the name of the triune God, such as the priestly blessing or apostolic benediction.

We are blessed in order to be a blessing to others. The charge calls the church to go forth as agents of God's mission in the world.

Following the hymn and the charge and benediction, a member of the choir takes our candlelighter to the communion table. He or she lights the taper from the candles on the table and the snuffs out the candles. He or she then walks out before the choir – leading us all out into the world for service.

You and I can heed the words of Jesus by following behind that light.

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. 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. 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.