

February 8, 2026

Matthew 5:13-20

“Let Your Light Shine!”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 North Oakland Ave.
Decatur, Illinois 62526

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Darkness is disorienting. Anyone who has ever woken up in the middle of the night and tried to walk through a familiar room without light knows how quickly confidence disappears. The same space that felt safe in daylight becomes uncertain. Furniture turns into obstacles as does things left on the floor. What we thought we knew becomes unclear.

Light changes everything. One small switch flipped in a dark room instantly turns uncertainty into clarity, confusion into orientation, danger into safety. Light does not argue with the darkness. It does not negotiate with it. It simply shines - and the darkness must retreat.

The words that Jesus speaks in our gospel lesson is about a humanity that has been darkened by sin, confused about truth, fearful about the future, and increasingly unsure about what is good and what is evil. Into that darkness Jesus does not merely offer advice or strategies. He gives himself - the Light. And then he says something astonishing to His disciples: "You are the light of the world."

Notice that he does not say, "Try to become the light of the world." Rather, he says, "You are the light of the world." This is declaration before it is exhortation. Identity before activity. This is gospel before living it. Jesus is speaking to people who already believe and belong to him—people he has called, forgiven, and made his own. Because they belong to him, they reflect him. In John 8:12, Jesus says: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

By ourselves, apart from Christ, we are not light at all. Scripture describes our natural condition as darkness - confusion about God, rebellion against his will, and hearts curved in on ourselves. But something decisive happens in Jesus. When he calls you by the gospel, when he joins you to himself in Baptism, when he forgives your sins and feeds you with his body and blood, his light - his life becomes yours! Not because you generate it, but because you reflect it. Just as the moon has no light of its own, it lights up the night sky by reflecting the sun. So it is that Christians shine only because Christ shines in them. That is why Jesus can say, without contradiction, "I am the light of the world" and also, "You are the light of the world." He is the source. We are the bearers. **Let Your Light Shine!**

Jesus then gives us an image: "A city set on a hill cannot be hidden." In his day, cities were often built on elevated ground for protection and visibility. At night, even a small city would glow from miles away. You could not make it disappear, even if you tried. So it is with those who belong to Christ. Faith is not a private possession meant to be locked away. It shapes how we speak, how we live, how we suffer, and how we love. Even when we are not trying to make a statement, Christ is making one through what others see. This is both a comfort and a warning.

It is comfort because your life in Christ matters, even when you feel insignificant. Your faithfulness to Jesus in ordinary callings - parent, spouse, worker, neighbor, friend - is not wasted or unseen. Christ is at work through you, often in ways you will never fully know. But it is also a warning, because hiding the light is a real temptation. Jesus says no one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket. Yet how often we try

to do just that - keeping faith quiet so that we do not offend, keeping Christ at arm's length so that we do not stand out, keeping the light dim so that it costs us nothing. And then there are those lifestyles that do not coincide with the life we have in Jesus. It is so easy to present ourselves in ways that are far from good.

Here we may feel the guilt that comes from God's law. We are afraid of people and are inclined to deny Christ and our Christianity. We prefer approval over faithfulness so that we worry about being labeled, dismissed, or rejected. And so the basket goes over the lamp. At other times, we hide the light, not out of fear, but out of shame. We know our failures. We know our sins. We know the inconsistency between our confession and our conduct. And so we think, "Who am I to shine? Who am I to speak?" But hiding the light does not make darkness safer. It only leaves people stumbling.

So, whenever we feel guilt and see our shame, we are all the more invited to take that to Jesus. We are invited to confess. And it is in that moment of confession that we are ready for the light of the good news of Jesus and the forgiveness of sins to brightly shine again in our hearts that we may once again shine. The Light can only shine in us because the Shine of Jesus is in us by his suffering and death on the cross. Your light shines in you because you are forgiven. It has nothing to do with us, but because Christ is merciful and has rescued us in his life, death, and resurrection.

By Jesus doing this we realize that his light in us cannot be hidden. As mentioned already, cities were often built on high ground. Imagine at night, their lamps would glow visibly across the countryside. Travelers oriented themselves by that light. Refugees looked for it. Enemies noticed it. Jesus is saying that our faith and life with him are visible. Faith is not merely an inner feeling, but it shapes outward reality. Our words, priorities, decisions, and relationships begin to change. Even in the mundane of every day existence, the light of Christ has a way of showing itself.

This is comforting. Your life in Christ is not meaningless or invisible. Your quiet faithfulness matters. And when you invite others to church, it is an invitation that is coming from Jesus through you. Where you go and what you do is where Christ is visiting others. **Let Your Light Shine!**

In our Gospel reading this morning, Jesus says, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." When Jesus speaks of others seeing your good works, he is not pointing to you as the source. Rather, what they see is the light of Christ shining in and through you. The good works on display are not your own achievements, but the saving work of the cross and the forgiveness of sins made visible in your life. And notice where the glory goes—not to you, not to me, not to the church, and not to human effort, but to the Father alone. Every good work that flows from faith ultimately points back to him. Good works do not produce faith; they flow from it. They are not done to earn salvation, but are done because salvation has already been freely given to us in Christ. Jesus does not say, "Let your light shine so that people will admire you." He says, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

The light shines in us not because of our strength or faithfulness, but because Christ himself is faithful. He has entered our darkness, taken our sin upon himself, and forgiven us completely by his cross.

In him, we are no longer defined by what we have done or failed to do, but by what he has done for us. He has assured us, again and again, of his steadfast and unfailing love - a love that endures even when our own love feels dim. And because Christ lives, we live in the sure hope and anticipation of everlasting light with him. We long for the day when shadows will flee forever, when sin and sorrow will be no more, and when we will dwell in nothing but his radiant presence in paradise. This promise of light shining into darkness is not new. Long before Christ was born in the flesh, God spoke through the prophet Isaiah. In the sixtieth chapter, Isaiah writes:

The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give you light; but the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself; for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended. Your people shall all be righteous; they shall possess the land forever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I might be glorified. The least one shall become a clan, and the smallest one a mighty nation; I am the Lord; in its time I will hasten it.

Dear brothers and Sisters, you are the light of the world—not because you are impressive, but because Christ is the light that shines in your hearts that you may have him and all that he forever gives. So let your light shine—not to earn God’s love, but because you already have it. Let it shine - not to draw attention to yourself, but to point others to Christ. For the Light of the world has come. And the darkness has not overcome it! Where Christ shines, the darkness of sin and death will not have the final word!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott