

Carry the Torch

Sterling UMC
November 22, 2009
Matthew 5:13-16

This morning is the conclusion of our series, "Rekindling the Flame." I hope you have taken your spiritual temperature and have a clear understanding of where you are with the Lord. I trust that you have committed yourself to those things that will make your fire of devotion to Jesus Christ burn brighter and hotter in your life. And I pray that you will commit yourself to avoiding those things that would cause your flame to die.

This morning, I want to ask you a question; where do you go from here?

We have had three weeks of revival theme and God has been present and at work in each of our hearts, but when this service is over and we walk out of these doors into this world are we going to be any different than we were on a few weeks ago? Will revival stay alive in your lives or will you slip very soon into your old ways and habits? Will your hearts continue to be on fire with the presence of Jesus Christ or will the flame flicker and die?

You see I believe the true measure of revival is not what happens in these three Sunday services, but the true measure of its success is what happens after it is over; when we go back into the everyday world of our lives.

You have two choices. You can choose to keep the flame burning or let it die out. You can choose to carry the torch or snuff it out. You can choose to march on to victory or you can choose to retreat and except defeat.

But it is absolutely clear that if we are going to be obedient to Jesus Christ, we must commit ourselves to taking the flame that we have in our heart and carrying that fire into this world.

My friends, it was for that very reason that Jesus Christ came into this world to bring light into our darkness. He boldly proclaimed, "I am the light of the world, he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." He came to be our beacon in the darkness, our lighthouse. And that is exactly what he does for us.

When everything around you seems dark, when nothing seems to make sense. You're afraid. There appears to be no hope. Suddenly there's light. There's a light at the end of the tunnel, and there is hope. His presence breaks like a dawn in our dark night and suddenly we can keep going because suddenly there is light in our dark world.

When you've lost our way. When you stumble and fall in the shadows of this life. When you try to go our own way, thinking you are in charge, and suddenly you find yourself heading for the rocks. A light shines in the darkness. He is your beacon that shows you the path so you can find your way home.

Darkness is the lie. Light is the truth. Darkness is enmity against God. Light is the love of God. Darkness is rebellion. Light is righteousness. Darkness is corruption, filth, and sin. Light is purity, holiness, and consecration to God. Darkness is folly. Light is wisdom. Darkness is desolation and death. Light is fellowship and life. But the good news is that light drives out darkness. Jesus came into our world and drove out the darkness with his glorious light. And because of his light we can have light and life. He is our lighthouse.

What a wonderful truth that is for us today. What a comfort and assurance that we can hold on to. But then this morning, on the heels of that great promise, we also hear these words. Jesus says, "You are the light of the world." That's right. You are the light of the world. You. Me. This church. Everyone who calls himself or herself a Christian. We are the light of the world. "A city on a hill cannot be hidden." Jesus continues. "Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on a stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." In other words if we live and seek to follow after Jesus Christ, if his light has shined into our lives, then we are to reflect his light. We must let his light shine through us. We must carry the torch, letting his light shine through us into this world.

How do we do this? When Jesus commanded his followers to be the light of the world, he demanded nothing less than that they should be like him. This light is a borrowed light, a reflected light. Jesus does not demand that we produce our own light. We must shine with the reflection of his light. Mother Teresa gives us some excellent advice:

Just allow people to see Jesus in you
To see how you pray
To see how you lead a pure life
To see how you deal with your family
To see how much peace there is in your family
Then you can look straight into their eye and say
"This is the way."
You speak from life; you speak from experience.

Light is something that is meant to be seen. As someone has said, "There can be no such thing as secret discipleship, for either the secrecy destroys the discipleship, or the discipleship destroys the secrecy." Our light should be perfectly visible to all. It should not shine only within the church. A Christian whose effects stop at the church door is not much use to anyone. It should be even more visible in the ordinary activities of the world. We let our light shine in the way we treat a clerk on the other side of the counter, in the way we order a meal in a restaurant, in the way we treat our employees or serve our employer, in the way we play a game or drive a car, in the daily language we use, in the daily literature we read. A Christian should be just as much a Christian in the office, the field, the classroom, the home, the kitchen, the golf course, and the playing field as he is in church. Jesus did not say, "You are the light of the church"; He said, "You are the light of the world."

All around us are so many who are walking, who are living in darkness. There are many who are poor and persecuted. There are countless groping in the darkness, searching for solutions to their problems; answers to their questions, hope for the future. Light for their darkness. And the sad thing is that many of them don't even realize they are in darkness. They go sailing through life as if everything is just fine and all the while they are drifting closer to the rocks that would tear them apart, leaving them to sink and drown. They believe they are "enlightened". They believe they have it all figured out. They think they have all the answers, and that they don't need anything or anyone to help light their way, and then, boom, they run headfirst into a brick wall, or they fall

headlong into a black hole. They are in desperate need of someone or something to bring some light into their dark world. What Jesus makes crystal clear to us this morning is that you and I are to be that light. We are called as Christ's disciples to be a beacon of his light in this dark world. If Jesus' light has truly shined in your life, how can we help but reflect that light in the world around us? As Jesus says, "A city on a hill cannot be hidden."

I am thankful this morning for the countless number of people who have shined the light of Jesus into my life. I have seen his light shine through my parents, my grandparents, through my wife and children, through members of my church family down through the years. His light has come to me through the ministry of pastors, Sunday school teachers, colleagues, professors, and friends. I have witnessed the light of Christ through many of your lives, as you have given of yourselves and shared Christ's love in both tangible and intangible ways.

But I wonder this morning, how many opportunities do we miss to share that message. As a church, as individuals, how often do we put our lamp under a bowl, instead of putting it on a stand? How often do we fail to be a light in the darkness?

How many times have you been quiet when you should speak? Or maybe it's the other way around. How many times did you speak when you should have been silent?

How many times instead of taking a stand on an issue, have you caved in to peer pressure, taken the easy way out and gone along with the crowd?

How many times like Peter when confronted as he stood around the campfire, have you denied the light?

Or maybe you have let something dim your light. Maybe some attitude, grudge, prejudice, habit, or sin has caused your light to weaken so that it no longer shines as brightly as it once did. Maybe you have become insensitive and calloused to the needs of others around you?

Maybe you don't feel like what you do or what you have to offer makes any difference anyway. Though you may seem to be doing nothing worthwhile in this world, you are doing something worthwhile if your life is being styled by God's grace. Lighthouse keepers never know how many ships they have turned away from the rocks. Their duty is to shine, not look for results.

On a dangerous seacoast stood a crude little lighthouse and lifesaving station. A few devoted workers were stationed there and they kept a constant watch over the sea. They worked hard to keep the light burning brightly. Through their diligence many lives were saved, and the little lighthouse became famous.

Grateful people donated time and money. Members trained new crews; they replaced the rusty metal railings, and covered the fading bricks with a fresh coat of paint. Soon they replaced the old light with a new high-powered bulb greatly increasing its range. They bought better boats and enlarged the building. The lighthouse prospered.

Now the little lighthouse became a popular gathering place for its members and admirers, it became sort of a club. No longer interested in undertaking its lifesaving mission, the people hired a crew to do it for them.

One stormy night following a huge shipwreck, the hired crews brought many cold, dirty, sick people to the lighthouse station. The property committee immediately built a shower house outside the club where shipwreck victims clean up before coming inside.

Soon there was a split in the club's membership. Most people saw the lifesaving activities as a hindrance. They told the few dissenters if they wanted to save lives, they could build their own lighthouse. And they did.

History continued to repeat itself. If you visit the seacoast town today, you will find several exclusive clubs along the shore. Shipwrecks are frequent, but most people drown.

My friends let us not let this tragic parable be true of us. As a church and as individuals, let us not become so wrapped up with ourselves that we lose sight of our true mission and purpose. There are so many whose lives are being tossed about in life's storms. There may even be some here this morning who feel they are walking in darkness. You feel you have lost your way. It seems that darkness is winning. You feel like your ship is about to crash and sink. Take heart today. Jesus Christ is the light of the world. He will be your lighthouse to drive out your darkness, to take away all fear, and to guide you safely home. He is ready to shine in your heart to bring you the hope, direction, and life that you need. But you have to let him in. You have to open your eyes and let his light shine in.

And then may each of us whose lives have been saved and transformed by Jesus Christ, our lighthouse, never let that light flicker and fade. Carry the torch. There is an interesting proverb that reads, "For lack of wood, the fire dies." Let that not be true of you. Let that not be true of us as a church. Let us throw some logs on the fire and fan the flames so we become a holy fire, burning with the desire to serve our Lord. The Lord needs you. People need you. Your church needs you. Your pastor needs you. And we need each other. We can't afford to sit in neutral, idling, treading water, marking time. Carry the torch. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.