

MY WITNESS***“Let Your Light So Shine”****(Biblical Text: Matthew 5:13-16)**Dr. Michael F. Gardner, Senior Pastor - Old Mission Church, Fairway, Kansas*

It's good to be back from vacation. I appreciate our other pastors bringing the message each week so I could have one! Join me in thanking them!

(applause)

However, I've been getting some really unusual questions in person and on Facebook this week. Like this one, *“So, did you also have a difficult birth and almost not survive?”* Now that's not your ordinary conversation starter!

Here was my answer. *“I was a month premature, but I managed to overcome that!”* The members of Old Mission now know more about the birth experience of their pastors than any Church in Kansas City!

Of course we have also shared our spiritual journey, how God has worked in our lives, and invited you to reflect on your own faith experience. Because whatever your faith journey has been, we each have a story to tell. Our job as Christians is, as our text says, *“Let your light so shine before others, that they may see your good works and give glory to God in heaven.”* (Matthew 5:16)

I told Pastor Leslie that like her, my own experience is more of an *“older brother”* faith story than that of a *“prodigal son,”* to use Jesus' metaphor from Luke 15. Even so, I have experienced the deep love and grace of God.

I was born to a mother who had a strong faith of her own. Within a few months, she presented me for Holy Baptism at *Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Grass Valley, CA*. My Christian journey began long before I even knew it.

That's important to me. Many years later, when I had become a pastor, in a children's time I asked the children, *“How long have you known that Jesus loves you?”* Ashley jumped up and down and shouted *“Five years!”* I asked, *“Ashley, how old are you?”* *“Four!”* **Now that's good theology!**

There are some things I believe at the core of my being. One of them is that even before our first breath, we are created in God's image and beloved of God. That's why I treasure my Certificate of Holy Baptism. Mother saved for more than fifty years, until I was *“grown up”* enough to have it.

That tells you something about my mother. It also tells you something about me. My *“growing up”* took a while. **Lord, have mercy.**

I had a good beginning at Emmanuel, and then at Central Presbyterian Church, when we moved to Kansas City. I was in worship every week whether I wanted to go or not. I sang in the Junior Choir. But in the school year that started in the fall of 1964 some amazing things happened to me.

First, my Sunday School teacher bought tickets for the whole class for the Beatles concert at Municipal Stadium - the only time the Beatles ever played In Kansas City. *Oh yeah, I was there!* (And forever hooked on rock and roll!)

That spring, on my Confirmation Day, Dr. Howard Chadwick read the Bible verse chosen for me, Matthew 5:16: *“Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”* That day, I gave Jesus all a thirteen-year-old boy knew how to give to him.

I'd like to say, *“I have never forgotten.”* But, too often I did. I began a process of wandering from my faith. By the time I graduated from High School I sort of *“graduated from Church”* too. I considered myself too smart and *“intellectually advanced”* to settle for the simple faith of Christianity.

In those years, I attend Church for exactly three reasons. To go to a funeral. To get married. And when I went home to visit Momma. That was it! I was so busy *“finding”* myself, my career, my family, and my own selfish desires, that I lost track of God. God, however, was not done *“seeking me.”*

Fast forward to the spring of 1977, when I went *“back to Church”* at the Trinity United Methodist Church, Ruston, Louisiana. Why did I go? My world and family had fallen apart. That day, God's amazing love came and just flowed over me, and I began to see that my life was worth living for him.

I've never been the same! I began to actually read the Bible, including our text today, the one I was introduced to so long ago by my childhood pastor.

“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.”¹

There is so much there, not just for me, but for all of us! Many of us are searching for the path to follow, or the perfect moment of insight that makes sense of our lives, or just the right words to express our feelings, or hopes or dreams. Sometimes we don't express it – but it's there.

¹ Matthew 5:14-16, *New Revised Standard Version Bible*. Copyright © 1989, Department of Christian Education, National

We know our current job isn't our *"dream job."* Even if we can't say exactly what our dream job would be, we're pretty sure that *"this ain't it."* The same thing could be said of our family, or house, or school, or even Church.

We just want life to come easier! We want to be able to do or accomplish whatever we desire whenever we want. In short, we want the "American myth" that Parker Palmer talks about in his book, Let Your Life Speak.

But he says that his authentic life began when he came to see, *"...despite the American myth, I cannot be or do whatever I desire."*² I think he's right.

Underneath our desire for the *"American Dream,"* there is a part of us that wants to shine the light God made us to shine. How do we do that?

I love the Quaker saying based on our text. *"Shine what light you have."* **Not someone else's light.** Not some famous athlete, musician or rock star, not Warren Buffet's, or Adam Hamilton's, or Jose Canseco's light, **your** light!

And we each have some light to shine! We are all different. Our stories are not the same. But we are all made to shine! And we can!

When we respond in kindness rather than anger - our light shines.

When we give people another chance when others wouldn't - our light shines.

When we go the second mile when others wouldn't - our light shines.

When we keep our word when it costs us something to do so - our light shines.

When we use money to build up people, rather than people to build up money...

When we share our story, each in our different way – our light shines.

Where do we learn to shine like that? Only one place I know. From Jesus, who shines his light into the darkness so brightly that the world cannot overcome it. (John 1:5) He is the source for our light!

It was not an accident that I chose our text today. Matthew 5:16, the last verse in our text, is why I am a Christian today. It's why I do what I do.

It also reminds me who to give credit for every good thing, and who to turn to when life is hard. It keeps reminding me what I am to do. And it reminds us what we are all to do, each in our different ways.

We are to shine what light we have.

"Let your light so shine in the world, that others may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

² Parker Palmer, Let Your Life Speak, Copyright © 1999, Jossey-Bass Publishers.