

“Be A Light In The Darkness”
Rev. Bill Freeman
Sunday, February 5, 2017
Menifee United Church of Christ

Math class. The math teacher, Miss Jones, saw that Little Johnny wasn't paying attention. So naturally, Miss Jones called on Little Johnny. Miss Jones said, "Little Johnny! What are 4 and 2 and 7 and 8?" Little Johnny thought for a moment and said, "Oh, that's easy, Miss Jones. 4 and 2 and 7 and 8 are NBC and CBS and ABC and PBS!"

It's good to pay attention. It's also good to be paid attention to. Not the way Miss Jones paid attention to Little Johnny. But it's good to be paid attention to, especially when you're doing something good. Not so that we can get recognition for doing something good, but so that people maybe can be inspired by us doing something good and do something good themselves.

Doing good can take many forms. Doing good can take the form of feeding the hungry. Doing good can take the form of clothing the naked. Doing good can take the form of welcoming the stranger. Many things that we do can be doing good. And doing good is not just restricted to Christians. Other people of other faiths and no faith do good. Jews and Buddhists and Muslims and Hindus and atheists do good. They feed the hungry and clothe the naked and welcome the stranger. They can do good as Christians can do good. And Jesus, I think, would appreciate that.

Jesus wants us to do good and wants us to be known for doing good, so that maybe other people will see that we're doing good and will be inspired to do good themselves. According to the gospel of Matthew, Jesus said, "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bushel basket, but on a lampstand so it can be seen and be a 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 God in heaven." So Jesus wants us to do good.

What is it that we can do that is doing good, being the light of the world? Jesus taught us to do many good things. Jesus taught us to love our neighbor. So when we love our neighbor we are the light of the world. Jesus taught us to love our enemies. So when we love our enemies, we are the light of the world. Jesus taught us to care for others. So when we care for others, we are the light of the world.

Soup cans this morning demonstrate people doing good here. It is Soup-er Bowl Sunday. Velna came up with this. People brought in cans of soup and we're going to enjoy soup later and soup will be given to people in need. That will demonstrate that we are trying to do good, that we are the light of the world. When we have our Food Pantry, we are the light of the world. When we have our Clothing Closet here in church, we are the light of the world. When we put up our rainbow flag and our COEXIST sign and now, in case you haven't noticed, we have a "Black Lives Matter" sign on the side of our building. All of them, our Food Pantry, our Clothing Closet, and our signs say that we're doing good, we are the light of the world, we are trying to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and welcome the stranger. That's what we're called to do. To do good.

King David wants to see us do good, to be the light of the world. King David in the Psalms says that when we have our light shining before others we are being righteous, we are doing good. So King David wants us to be the light of the world, Jesus wants us to be the light of the world, and God wants us to be the light of the world. And we can be. We can be the light of the world. We can be a light in the darkness for people who may be inspired to do good themselves.

Demonstrators across America were the light of the world the last few weeks. Many of us took part in the Women's March a couple weekends ago. We marched in Riverside. Other people, hundreds of thousands of people, marched in Los Angeles, in Chicago, in New York, and in Washington, D.C. for women's rights. Some people marched for women's right to be paid the same as men. Some people marched for women's right to receive health care from Planned Parenthood. Some people marched for women's right to control their own bodies. Then there were other demonstrators, hundreds of thousands of demonstrators, protesting the recent Executive Orders from the new president that said he would build a wall to keep out people from Mexico, to keep immigrants from coming here illegally. People also demonstrated against an Executive Order from the president saying we would ban all people from seven countries, predominantly Muslim countries, although the intention is to ban Muslims from those countries. People marched against that. The marchers for the Women's March and the protestors, I believe were the light of the world; they were bringing light into the darkness.

The Bible says it's not always easy to be a light in the darkness. It can be dangerous. Jesus was crucified for being a light in the darkness. John the Baptist was beheaded for being a light in the darkness. The Apostle Paul was martyred for being a light in the darkness. So was Peter. Being a light in the darkness can sometimes be hazardous to your health. But what's the alternative? To hide your light under a bushel basket? To be a part of the darkness?

Not all people agree on what is the light and what is the darkness. Some people might see demonstrating for women's rights and demonstrating against a wall being built to keep people out of our country, demonstrating against keeping Muslims from coming to our country, as being a light in the darkness. Other people might see building a wall to keep people out of our country, having a moratorium on letting Muslims come into our country, deporting immigrants who are here illegally, some people might see that as the light, not the darkness. But, if you think about what Jesus said, Jesus said, "Just as you did it to one of the least of these, who are members of my family, you did it to me." I think that gives us an idea about what Jesus would say is the light and what is the darkness.

California Governor Jerry Brown, I believe, was a light in the darkness in his state of the state address a couple of weeks ago, when he spoke out against the building of the wall and the idea of deporting people who are here illegally. Governor Brown said, "And let me be clear: we will defend everybody – every man, woman and child – who has come here for a better life and has contributed to the well-being of our state... California is not turning back. Not now, not ever. His truth is marching on." He said it without breaking up, but that's how I reacted when I heard it as I was driving in the car. I think California and Governor Brown are being a light in the darkness. I'm not sure what the President thought of his remarks. I haven't seen any tweets coming as a result, but I believe Governor Brown was being a light in the darkness and he wants California to be a light in the darkness.

"This Little Light of Mine" is a song we sing in church. We sang it a few minutes ago, that speaks to our topic. Now "This Little Light of Mine" might be a children's song, and it is, but it also has a profound adult message. "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine, this little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine, this little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine, let it shine, let it shine, let it shine." That's what we're to do, is to let our light shine. I believe our light is our heart. I believe our light is our spirit. I believe our light is our soul. And we are to let our light shine.

What about you? Do you let your light shine? Or do you hide your light under a bushel basket? It's not always easy to let your light shine. It's easier to hide your light under a bushel basket. I did that for many years. I have an excuse for doing that. Of course, we all have our excuses. But I was a TV news reporter. I was supposed to be neutral. So I couldn't let my light shine. I couldn't speak out for what I believed in. But then I became a radio talk show host and I could let my light shine, as it were. I could be a light in the darkness. Now, as a minister, perhaps sometimes despite popular demand, I can be a light in the darkness. I can speak out for what I believe to be the truth. I can be, as best I can, the light of the world. As can you. You can be the light of the world. You can be a light in the darkness. You can see someone in need and lend them a hand. You can see someone who's hurting and let them lean or cry on your shoulder. You can see an injustice and work to make it right. You can be a light in the world, and maybe you are. You can be a light in the darkness. And I hope we all will be.

Let us pray.
God of love,
Help us to do good works.
Help us to be a light in the darkness.
And help us to be the light of the world.
Now and forevermore.
By the power of the Holy Spirit.
And in the name of Jesus.
Amen.

*(This sermon was delivered without manuscript or notes,
and was transcribed from a recording of it.)*