

You are the Lighthouse of the World

Message for Sunday, May 26, 2013
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Matthew 5:14-16; 1 Peter 3:15-16

1) "Candles in the Closet"

Max Lucado writes wonderful stories! Here's one of them:

There was a blackout one night. When the lights went out, I fumbled to the closet where we keep the candles for nights like this. I lit four of them. I was turning to leave with the large candle in my hand when I heard a voice, "Now, hold it right there."

"Who said that?"

"I did." The voice was near my hand.

"Who are you? Where are you?"

"I'm the candle in your hand."

I lifted up the candle to take a closer look. There was a tiny face in the wax. "Don't take me out of here!"

"What?"

"I said, Don't take me out of this room."

"What do you mean? I have to take you out. You're a candle. Your job is to give light. It's dark out there."

"But you can't take me out. I'm not ready," the candle explained with pleading eyes. "I need more preparation."

I couldn't believe my ears. "More preparation?"

"Yeah, I've decided I need to research this job of light-giving so I won't go out and make a bunch of mistakes. You'd be surprised how distorted the glow of an untrained candle can be. So I'm doing some studying. I just finished a book on wind resistance. And now I'm listening to —"

"All right then," I said. "You're not the only candle on the shelf. I'll blow you out and take the others!"

But just as I got my cheeks full of air, I heard other voices. "We're not going either!"

I turned to the other candles, "You are candles and your job is to light dark places!"

"Well, that may be what you think," said one, "You may think we have to go, but I'm busy."

"You're busy?" I said with disbelief.

"I'm meditating on the importance of light. It's really enlightening."

"And you other two," I asked, "Are you going to stay, too?"

A short, fat, purple candle with plump cheeks spoke up. "I'm waiting to get my life together. I'm not stable enough. I lose my temper easily. I guess you could say that I'm a hothead."

The last candle had a female voice, very pleasant to the ear. "I'd like to help," she explained, "but lighting the darkness is not my gift."

All these excuses were sounding similar. "Not your gift? What do you mean?"

"I'm a singer. I sing to other candles to encourage them to burn more brightly." She began a rendition of "This Little Light of Mine." The other three joined in, filling the closet with singing.

I took a step back and considered the absurdity of it all. Four perfectly healthy candles singing to each other about light but refusing to come out of the closet. I had all I could take. One by one I blew them out. I exited the room and found my wife in the darkness.

"Where are the candles?" she asked.

"They don't... they won't work. Where did you buy those candles anyway?"

"Oh, they're church candles. Remember the church that closed down across the town? I bought them there."

I understood.

Jesus says to us, "Let your light shine." In other words, don't stay in the closet.

2) Afraid of the dark?

Are you afraid of the dark? Most people have some fear of dark places, some more than others. Why is this?

Some reasons:

- we can't see where we're going
- we can't see what's out there
- fear of the unknown

The people of the Bible had similar ideas. They were also afraid of the dark. But there was more to it: they believed that the dark was the domain of evil spirits.

Light, on the other hand, was a symbol of God's glory and guidance. Perhaps the greatest expression we have of this is in John 8:12, where Jesus declares, "I am the light of the world."

Jesus came into a world where work was hard. Life for the average person was generally dull and drab, and consisted in just managing to survive.

On top of this, people were forced to obey a long list of laws, impossible to keep. The Law of Moses had been designed to help them know God, but the religious leaders had added so many extra laws of their own, making it an unbearable burden.

When Jesus came along, and told stories about how God was like a loving Father, people's lives were changed. Many who had given up on God found new faith. They were like thirsty people in a desert, and Jesus was like a spring of fresh water.

The disciples were among those who eagerly accepted Jesus and his message. Their new leader promised that if they believed in him, they would have eternal life. They would have the Holy Spirit living within them. They would be assured of joy and peace that nothing in this life could take away.

But there was more. Jesus said, "You are the light of the world." I can picture them, eyes bugged out, mouths agape, stammering "What! No, Jesus, you said you were the light of the world! We want to follow you!"

And Jesus replies something like, "Yes, follow me. But you must work also." In fact, here's exactly what he said:

Matthew 5:14-16, Today's English Version:
"You are like light for the whole world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bowl; instead it is put on the lampstand, where it gives light for everyone in the house. In the same way your light must shine before people, so that they will see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven."

I can imagine how that conversation might have continued.

"But Jesus, how can we do that? We're just ordinary people!"

"I know that. You are exactly the people I need. I want you to be the light of the world. Let my light shine in your life, so people will see me. By your example, they too will want to follow me."

A Greyhound bus stopped for supper in a town with four restaurants. The driver announced, "Folks, we'll be here for 30 minutes. The bus company has a strict policy never to recommend an eating place by name, so I am not permitted to tell you where to go. However, if anyone wants me while we are here, I'll be at Tony's diner directly across the street." You can guess where most of the passengers went for their supper! They followed the example of the bus driver.

If Jesus were talking to us today, he may have talked about lighthouses. A lighthouse stands way up high in the air, so that it can be seen from far away. A lighthouse has to be able to withstand the pounding ocean waves, so the building is quite large and solid. But up at the top, the bulb that produces the light is surprisingly small. The key is a combination of a curved mirror behind the light, and a powerful lens in front of the light. They focus the light into a powerful beam which can be seen many kilometres away. The light bulb inside is the source of the light; but it is seen in the world because of the work of the mirror and the lens.

Jesus is saying to us: "I want you to be like that lighthouse. I want you to be the light of the world. Yes, I'll still be the light of the world. You look to me as your light. But I want you to act as the mirrors in that lighthouse. I want you to reflect me in your lives. People will see me in you, and come to know me because of you. You are the light of the world."

When the disciples heard this, they were probably excited, but also a bit scared. "Jesus, OK we'll do it. We trust that you'll be with us, helping us. Can you show us how to start?"

And Jesus may have said, "I'd be glad to." And over the next three years, Jesus taught them and showed them what it means to be his follower.

I heard of a woman who felt very much alone at her job because she was the only Christian there. Even worse, some of the other staff would make fun of her for her faith, and accuse her of being narrow-minded. Finally she became so discouraged that she considered quitting her job. Before doing that, however, she talked with her pastor.

After listening to her complaints, the minister asked, “Where do people usually put lights?” “In dark places,” she replied.

No sooner had she spoken the words than she realized how her answer applied to her own life. She recognized that her place of work was indeed a “dark place” where “light” was vitally needed, so she decided to stay where she was and become a stronger influence for Jesus. It wasn’t long after that that a number of her fellow employees turned their lives over to Jesus.

My friends, you and I are lights. So shine!

Next Steps:

- Be ready to be a light.
 - 1 Peter 3:15-16, Today’s English Version:
Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you, but do it with gentleness and respect.
Think about what you will say when someone asks you about your faith.
- Be glad to be a light. Knowing Jesus has made a difference in your life. Wouldn’t it be awesome to help someone else also know Jesus?
- Be a light. Don’t be like those candles, just singing and thinking about it; *do it*. Here’s how:
 - Ask God to reveal to you two people he wants you to talk to about Jesus.
 - Ask him to prepare their hearts for hearing the Gospel.
 - Also, ask him to prepare *your* heart for talking to them.
 - Then, in faith, step past your fears and believe Jesus is already at work creating a “divine appointment” for you to talk to them. Now, watch for the way he answers your prayer.