

Be the Light

Scripture: Matthew 5:14-16 [The Message]

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Be the Light

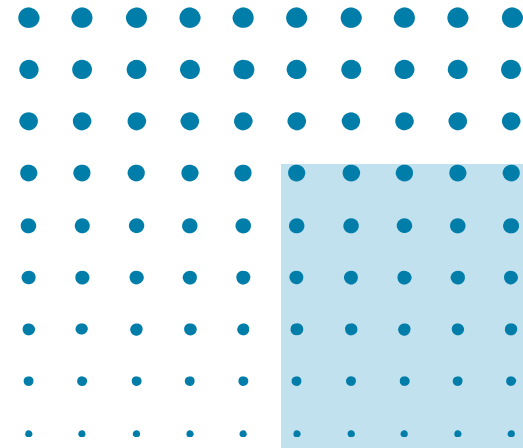
Background

For over 75 years, the One Great Hour of Sharing Offering (OGHS) has been helping American and Canadian Christians bring God's hope and healing to hurting people domestically and around the world.

OGHS's mission is to support domestic and international development, fight poverty and its consequences, bring aid and relief to communities torn by war or ravaged by national disaster, advocacy and resettlement assistance for refugees and displaced persons, and combat injustice in its many forms. OGHS provides funding and hands-on assistance in collaboration with local and international partners.

Each year, the Offering is gathered by several denominations and Church World Service (CWS) under a single theme developed by the ecumenical OGHS Committee. In addition to posters, brochures, and interactive media, the Committee commissions a Planning and Resource Guide that contains a variety of resources and activities for pastors and church leaders to use as they promote and receive the offering.

Thank you for supporting One Great Hour of Sharing for over 75 years. You continue to be light in places that need it.





Theme Interpretation and Scriptural Exegesis: Be the Light

The fifth chapter of Matthew's Gospel opens with the Sermon on the Mount and Beatitudes. At first glance, Jesus' words are shocking—people who are burdened in mind, body, and spirit are actually blessed!

Despite their situation or condition, they are already winning...or maybe, it is because of their pain that blessings come. The anxiety, fear, grief, confusion, hunger, discouragement, and despair they experience actually put them closer to God. Jesus does not glorify pain; rather, he teaches that such suffering puts them first in God's heart. God is there to help and heal—as a gift, no conditions, and no strings. They are part of God's family, God's Reign, and God's Kingdom. God's Kingdom is more than a place or future destination—it is a relationship with a loving and just God.

Jesus does not sugar-coat the reality of most people during his day. He declares that their suffering is not the end of the story. God sees them and hears their cries; God moves to alleviate their pain, in the short run and the long run. God's Reign of love and healing is already happening—bringing life out of death, joy out of sorrow, hope out of despair.

Jesus cautions that the response to God's blessing is not one of passivity. He makes clear that God's children are blessed and are to be a blessing to and for others; those who receive, are to give back.

God's Reign is not a spectator sport; the faithful do not have the option to sit back and watch events unfold. They are invited and challenged to be something and to do something. Followers of Jesus are transformed—from the inside out—as they receive the gifts of God's grace and are called to gift others with love, compassion, and generosity.

Jesus' entire ministry is active—teaching, preaching, healing, connecting. Jesus sets the standard for “Kingdom-living”—where love, unity, and harmony are the benchmarks for community life. Jesus invites us all to be active—doing what we can to embody compassion; to stand up for equity and fairness; to care for those in need without seeking reward or notoriety. Jesus teaches his disciples—and us—that God's Reign is a present reality and a future hope.



Theme Interpretation and Scriptural Exegesis: Be the Light (Continued)

For Jesus, God's Reign is about forming communities of diverse people, living as siblings, caring for each other and the created order, and building communities of justice and love where all are fed, sheltered, healed, and safe. Jesus declares that God's Reign is happening right now, even as we wait for its fulfillment.

Jesus invites his listeners—and us—to fully embrace the gift and grace God offers and be the gift that keeps on giving, the light that keeps on shining. Many of the ordinary people listening to and eavesdropping on Jesus' conversation with his disciples that day understood and dedicated themselves to the challenge.

Jesus assures us that we are what God intends: open-hearted, generous, and compassionate. By fully living into our identity as children of God, we spread God-colors throughout the world, bearing light, hope, and love to a desperate and dying world.

Have you ever watched suncatchers? Suncatchers are ornaments made of glass, crystal, or some translucent material. Usually hung in a window or outdoors, they spin to reflect and filter light, casting color in the area surrounding them—hues of blue, red,

green, purple, and yellow—a limitless array of colors and patterns that symbolize warmth, love, compassion, generosity, and hospitality. Suncatchers bear and spread color—just as our good deeds bear light and send color into the world.

Be light—in your home, church, and community—tutor students after school; make a casserole for a bereaved family; gather signatures for petitions that highlight important issues; pick up trash around your neighborhood; make blankets for the unsheltered—let the need beckon you to action.

Be light—in the world by making a generous contribution to One Great Hour of Sharing. Your gift supports those doing ministry throughout the United States and across the globe—bringing hope, expertise, compassion, and love to places we may never visit and people we may never meet. Your giving to OGHS provides funding and hands-on assistance and promotes collaboration with local and international partners.



Theme Interpretation and Scriptural Exegesis: Be the Light (Continued)

Be the light! For the sake of sisters and brothers who have renewed hope because you care enough to shine.

Be the light! So that women and men around the world can find their way and know that there is a path forward.

Be the light! Sharing God-colors with all you encounter!

Give generously to One Great Hour of Sharing! Follow in the footsteps of The Light of the World! Shine brightly!

Scriptural Commentary and Sermon Starter

What would you do if you knew you could not fail? It's a question we should ask ourselves regularly. It is a question that Jesus implies when he tells his disciples—and us—to be light, bringing God-colors in the world.

Jesus stands in the tradition of Moses by interpreting God's vision for creation. The Beatitudes and Ten Commandments let us know that communities of justice, love, compassion, and generosity are desired by God and are possible—here and now.

God calls us to live with integrity—with head and heart connected, with intention and action aligned.

In Matthew 5, Jesus teaches that God is already transforming and loving the world, already empowering God's people to be all they can be—lights bringing God-colors to every corner of creation.

Jesus challenges his disciples—and us—to live as if believing in and trusting God makes a difference. To be light because that, simply, is who we are.

Jesus sets a high bar for discipleship: preaching and teaching despite resistance from some and outright hostility from others; healing on the spot instead of keeping office hours; meaningfully engaging those cast out and on the margins of society; breaking bread with the ne'er-do-wells at tables denied to them.

Jesus challenges us to do likewise and from a place of blessedness—we already have everything we need to be light-bearers. We need only to shine.



Scriptural Commentary and Sermon Starter (Continued)

As you prepare to preach and teach for One Great Hour of Sharing, make clear that Jesus is not promoting transactional faith. We don't bargain with God for favors or blessings. We expect nothing in return for being fully who God has created us to be. We do good works in gratitude for all that God has done for us, as a response of thankfulness.

If your church has stained glass windows, invite the congregation to think about what the windows portray and why. Share any history you have about the windows. Ask how the scenes look as the intensity of sunlight changes throughout the day. How are the windows light-bearers of God's love and presence?

If your church does not have stained glass, use an example found on the Internet. One example is the website for St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church in San Francisco (<https://www.saintgregorys.org>). While not stained glass, the "Dancing Saints" is an iconic installation of ninety persons that wraps around the church rotunda—with a 12-foot-tall dancing Christ.

The saints are a wide array of persons from a multitude of time periods, faith traditions, and backgrounds—King David, Frances of Assisi, Anne Frank, and Malcolm X, among others. As the congregation dances around the altar during the liturgy, the saints dance above, proclaiming a sweeping, universal vision of God's light shining through human life.

Who would you include in a modern stained glass window? Who would you see in a window that represents One Great Hour of Sharing? This is an opportunity to identify and honor those who have been or are living into the light to which God has called them. Invite your members to think about how they can be light-bearers for others.

Jesus' call for us to be light is ongoing. Communities are in crisis. Storms devastate the countryside. Far too many persons are vulnerable—lacking power, resources, and social support—and are brutally mistreated. The earth is abused and creation is disrespected. Justice is denied.



Scriptural Commentary and Sermon Starter (Continued)

When you give to One Great Hour of Sharing, you are light for people in need.

You offer light when disasters hit.

You offer light when conditions threaten families and communities.

When you give to One Great Hour of Sharing, you are light for communities here and across the globe.

You offer light that restores structures and transforms lives.

You offer light that blesses others to shine.

When you give to One Great Hour of Sharing, you are light that shines today, tomorrow, and well into the future.

You—we—are light-bearers.

Let us be the light.

Let us shine.

Let us go public.

Find a hilltop.

Let us keep open house and be generous with our lives and in our giving.

Let us make a difference—give to One Great Hour of Sharing!

Rev. Barbara Essex

Be the Light



Matthew 5:14-16 (The Message)

14-16 “Here’s another way to put it: You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don’t think I’m going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I’m putting you on a light stand. Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.

Call to Worship

One: Be the light, bearing it to all the world

All: No hiding.

Be the light, sharing it with all you encounter.

No stalling.

Be the light, so that our neighbors can find their way.

No holding back.

Be the light, so that the world will know there is a path forward.

No hiding. No stalling. No holding.

We move forward to be the light.

Prayer of Invocation

Creator and Creative God, The sun rises in the morning, bringing forth the many-colored hues of light illuminating the day. At night, the moon rises to illuminate the sky. The stars shine, giving light where there is none. Regardless of the time of day or night, God sends light to the world. Each of us is called to bear the light in that same way, no matter the time of day or the situation we find ourselves in. As we worship, we follow in the footsteps of the one who was the light of the world, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.



Litany or Responsive Reading

One: When communities are in crisis,

All: Be the light.

When tornados devastate the countryside,

Be the light.

When human beings are mistreated,

Be the light.

When the earth is abused and creation is disrespected,

Be the light.

When justice is denied,

Be the light.

When another is in need,

Be the light.

Light-bearers you are,

We will be the light.

Go public. Find a hilltop.

We will be the light.

Invitation to Communion

“It is late at night,
so dark you cannot see the path home,
and you are suddenly lost
in this place
that once felt familiar and safe.”

Thus begins the poem by Tom Atkins. As we move through life, we often find ourselves lost, even in places that can seem quite familiar. This can happen for many reasons and at many different times in our lives.

The sacrament (or time) of Holy Communion is a moment that beckons us home, no matter how lost we may feel. In these simple elements of bread and wine, and through an invitation from Christ to this table, we realize that the meal is for all and that it is Christ who serves as the host.



Invitation to Communion (Continued)

However, Atkins' poem concludes by reminding us that the table is a place where we are never alone:

“Next time, you vow, as the path grows clear,
you will bring a lantern,
your own light,
and join others lost in the night,
a defiance of the dark,
a beacon,
a reminder to all who see you
that they are never, ever
alone.”

At this table, we share in the fellowship of one another and with Christ. We bring the light of Christ with us and others are able to find the table, dine with others and find that which is familiar and safe. Come, now, as Christ shares the best with us.

Communion Prayer

From the beginning of creation, light has been an ever-present gift to humanity. God spoke forth light and it shone over all the earth. Human beings were created with the breath of God and the light shone forth from each person, formed in the very image of God. After the flood, a rainbow lights up the sky to remind us of the covenant with God for the rest of time.

There were times where (or when) the light was not as visible. Humanity did not react to the light as we should have. We followed kings and despots, when the sages and prophets were calling us to follow along different paths.

Eventually you sent your son, Jesus, who called himself the light of the world and called us to join him in sharing the light with all we encounter. After his death and resurrection, you sent the Spirit to illuminate our lives so that we could continue to bear the light of Christ into the world for ages to come.

Sharing that light still today, we boldly proclaim this truth, which we believe, live, and proclaim:

Continue with the Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy) and the Great Thanksgiving as your tradition practices.



Invitation to the Offering

Lea Morris wrote a song called “Be the Light.”

There is always a light – when we are ready to see it
There is always a light – when we are ready to be it
To see the light, to be the light, to raise our eyes in the dark of night

[To climb this hill, together we will].

The song ends with the words, “Be a gift to the world.” You are invited to offer the gift of light to others around the world through One Great Hour of Sharing.

[Optional addition: Your gifts assist people like Orfelina (pictured on the One Great Hour of Sharing poster and bulletin insert), who works with families in the northern regions of Honduras to help them understand how to transform their families and communities through agriculture. She teaches, monitors, prepares, chats, supports, and encourages. She brings light wherever she goes. Imagine how many more people can be empowered for mission as we give generously.]

Jesus’ call for us to be light is an ongoing opportunity for us to offer a gift to another. The world needs light more than ever before. We cannot be in all of these places ourselves or even see them with our own eyes, but through our generous tithes, offerings and special gifts, we can be a light which shines day or night. In that spirit, let us share now!

Prayer of Dedication

Generous God, we offer these gifts in the spirit of light and with a heart full of gratitude for what we’ve been given. These offerings show our commitment to sharing with those in need, neighbors near and far, whom we are unlikely to meet. As we share, we shine the light of our faith with brothers and sisters we may never meet. Bless the gifts, just as you have us, with an extra measure of your grace. In Christ’s name, Amen.



Charge and Benediction

[Encourage those in your congregations to shine the lights on their cell phones during the benediction as a way of signaling that they will be the light shining in the places where they find themselves but that, collectively, the light is brighter when we join others in being the light.]

One: May you always be the light, shining bright in the darkness, just as Jesus calls us to.

All: Let your kindness be a beacon, your compassion a guiding star, and your love a radiant flame.

One: As you illuminate the world with your actions, may others see your good deeds and be inspired to glorify the divine.

All: We go forth, empowered by faith, let our light shine for all to see.

Hymn Suggestions

- This Little Light of Mine – African American Spiritual
- Bring Forth the Kingdom – Marty Haugen
- Gather Us In – Marty Haugen
- O Word of God, Incarnate – William W. How
- Jesus Bids Us Shine – Susan Warner
- Christ Be Our Light—Bernadette Ferrell
- As a Fire Is Meant for Burning – Ruth Duck
- O Jesus I Have Promised – John E. Bode / Arthur H. Mann
- Song for the Nations – Chris Christensen (referenced in last year's materials)
- Salt & Light – Jan and John L'Ecuyer
- Shine, Jesus, Shine – Graham Kendrick
- Go, Light Your World – Kathy Troccoli
- We Are Called to Be God's People – Thomas Jackson
- Pass It On – Kurt Kaiser
- Sois la Semilla (You Are the Seed) – Cesareo Gabaraín