wick that burns the vapors. It does not put out that much light, but it gets the job done if the room is dark and you put it on a stand. The last thing you want to do is shield the light from doing its job. Jesus asks us to le our light shine, without shielding them, so that they illuminate those around us.

Just for a moment, I want you to picture faith as a light bulb or a car headlight. Our faith shines, but over time we put out less light because our faith becomes covered with a thick layer of dust. That layer of dust which keeps the light of Christ from shining brightly through us is our sinful nature. As we grow in faith and begin to use our God-given gifts, a layer of dust is washed away making our light shine more brightly. As we live into the Gospel, the Spirit makes our light shine brighter so God’s wisdom, understanding, peace, and reconciliation are shared with those around us.

If are faith-lights are dim, if the layer of dust is shielding them from view, it is because we are the ones holding Christ back, we are the ones standing in the way; and the truth is we do it by choice. Jesus said, “This is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God” (John 3:19-21).

Our human stubbornness and disobedience lead to sin. Like Adam and Eve, we prefer our wills to God’s will. There is a dark side to our nature. We can be egotistical and self-centered. We can be hateful and mean-spirited. We want to do things our way. We want to call the shots…make the rules…be our own gods. The more we give in to our sinful nature and follow the crowd, the more we stifle the light of Christ within us and the less difference there is between us and the darkness of the world around us.

The Good News is that the more we say “no” to our sinful nature and turn to God, the brighter the light of Christ shines within us and through us, and the more we can dispel the forces of darkness and injustice. So, with that in mind, let’s examine the Source, the Service, and the Success of this little light!

**The Source of this Light.** Scripture teaches that God created us in God’s image. We are born in the image of God to reflect God’s glory. The beauty of God’s holiness, God’s perfect light, dwells deep within us. For the Christian, that light has its source in Jesus Christ, who said: “I am the light of the world: Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). Jesus is “The true light that gives light to everyone” (John 1:9), and his mission is to “come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.” (John 12:46).

Jesus says, “let your light shine before others” (Matthew 5:16a). True light comes from Jesus Christ. He gives this light freely to believers so that they will shed his light of wisdom, understanding, peace, and reconciliation on the world. Jesus urged his followers to place their light where it can best shine, and to remove all the things that shroud its power. Our light cannot shine brightly through hearts filled with sin, or minds preoccupied with evil, or deeds done for selfish purposes, or words spoken in hatred. Jesus desires our life to be clean and holy so it will reflect his light properly and effectively.

**The Service of this Light.** We are encouraged to let our light shine so that others “may see our good works” (Matthew 5:16b). The reason we shine our light is so that others may see the truth of the Christian faith, the comfort and joy of a life in Christ, the power and purpose of Christian community, and to draw them – like a moth to a flame – toward Jesus. God desires all people to know God and become God’s children; and God’s desire for God’s children is that they “may become blameless and pure, ‘children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.’ Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky” (Philippians 2:15, quoting Deuteronomy 32:5).

Author Ruth E. Renkel is quoted as saying, “Never fear shadows. They simply mean there’s a light shining somewhere nearby.” As light shines it banishes the darkness. As the light grows, the darkness recedes. Light shows the path and illuminates the way. Light prevents evil from spreading. The light of Christ points people to the love and mercy and grace and justice of God. We are called to acknowledge the source of our light and to put that light into service so that it will “glorify [our] Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16c).

**The Success of this Light**. The light of Christ shining through us is truly a success when it glorifies God. Our light glorifies God when it proclaims God’s word, reaches those who are lost, restores the fallen, tends to the poor, preaches justice for the oppressed, rescues the perishing, strengthens others in faith, and extends God’s righteous reign worldwide. The chief aim of every Christian is to glorify God through our words and deeds, through our lights shining brightly. Some days our lights may feel dim, but the apostle Paul encourages us when he says: “For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light” (Ephesians 5:8).

The late civil rights leader Vincent Harding, in an interview, recalled the marchers on Bloody Sunday in Selma, Alabama. Despite their fear of what lay ahead of them — the police truncheons, the fierce dogs, the tear gas — they sang a simple children’s song: 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. “No matter what you may do to us,” they sang, with Bull Connor’s men in mind, “We’re gonna let it shine. It is not our light. It is God’s light. One way or the other, that light is gonna shine!”

The world we live in is a mess, and it doesn’t look like it is going to get better anytime soon. So, what is the Good News?  Simply this: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:5). Jesus gave his life to reconcile the world to God and open the gates of heaven for all who believe in him. In the meantime, God’s Spirit helps us to grow in faith and to live each day as God’s lights in and for the world. Ultimately, God will triumph, and Jesus will reign as King of kings and Lord of lords over all creation. Until Christ comes, be steadfast in faith and share the Good News of his love, grace, mercy, and justice with others. Let your light shine brightly, dispel the darkness around you, and be that a glimmer of hope to the world.

Let us pray: Prayer: Jesus, we believe that you are the light of the world and that you call us to bear your light to the world. Help us to be authentic disciples of yours, not drawing attention to ourselves, but to you, the source of our light and life. The world is so dark, and we feel so powerless to do anything about it. Embolden our witness and give us courage to serve, that we may be a shining example of your grace and love, for we ask it in your holy name. Amen.

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**Let Your Light Shine!**

Sunday, October 23, 2022 Psalm 27

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN Matthew 5:14-16

In today’s text, Jesus refers to a city on hill that cannot be hidden. It is possible that Jesus referred to the city of Sepphoris, the new and emerging capital of Tetrarch Herod Antipas (son of Herod the Great).  Sepphoris was the most extensive building project of the day.  If you were a laborer or craftsman, Sepphoris was a good place to find work. There were dozens of great buildings going up, so there were jobs to be had by all.

Sepphoris is situated on a hill, almost 1,000 feet above sea level, with a commanding view of the valley below. Recent excavations unearthed an extensive Romanesque city with elaborate villas featuring exceptional mosaic floors. There are stepped pools for bathing and an outdoor theatre for entertainment. Sepphoris reportedly thrived as a center of learning, with a diverse, multiethnic, and multireligious population of some 30,000 residents living in relatively peaceful coexistence. What’s more, Sepphoris is located just 3.7 miles from Nazareth.  Since Joseph, Jesus’ earthly father, was a craftsman, it is possible that he sought work in Sepphoris, and it is also possible that Jesus served as his father’s apprentice.

So, let’s say Joseph has a steady job in Sepphoris, and Jesus is his apprentice.  Joseph and his family did not live there; they could not afford to live there.  So, Joseph and Jesus get up early each morning and walk to the job site, arriving before sunrise.  At sunset, they store their tools, clean up, and walk home, again in the dark. On the way to work, and on the way home, they see the torches lighting the streets and homes of Sepphoris. Little wonder then, when Jesus reached for an image to make his point, he drew from what he knew best: a city set on a hill that could not be hidden, its lights shining for all to see.

Jesus would have us be just such lights shining God’s truth and grace to the world. Jesus calls us to be people who shine God’s light into the dark corners, glow with God’s justice, and brighten the lives of those who are troubled. The light, or lamp, of which Jesus speaks is most likely a small olive oil lamp. The ones I’ve seen are about the size of your hand and made of clay. The body holds the oil, and the spout has a