

You are the light of the world!

What does that mean for us?

Bible reference Matthew 5:13-20

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵ People do not light a lamp and put it under the bushel basket; rather, they put it 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.

Since Christmas Day we have been hearing about the light that comes into the world. On Christmas Day John 1 and again on 4 January we have John 1. Pastor Sue preached on January 4 and said this:

John speaks honestly about darkness. He does not deny it or minimise it. “The light shines in the darkness,” he says, “and the darkness did not overcome it.”

Notice that he does not claim the darkness disappears. The Gospel never asks us to pretend that violence, hatred, or fear are not real. But it does insist that they do not get the final word.



Christian hope is not naïve optimism. It is resilient trust—trust that love is stronger than fear, that truth outlasts lies, and that grace is more enduring than hatred. Even a small light changes a dark room. Even fragile acts of kindness resist the pull of despair. The darkness has not overcome the light.

“Even a small light changes a dark room.”

At that time, Sue preached into the context of the darkness of the Bondi terrorist acts of violence in December. The deep darkness of evil which seeks to destroy and divide.

In the sermon on the mount Jesus speaks both of us as the light of the world and a light like a city on a hill for all to see.

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid... let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.....

what does it mean for us in word and deed to shine like a city on a hill?

Recently Pastor Sue and I came across this rather remarkable welcome from a church which caught our attention:



A very different message from those who preach hate and prejudice don't you think?

And I have to say what caught my eye was the start the final sentence "We welcome pilgrims, tourists..."

Jesus says we are the light of the world. we are a city on a hill which cannot be hid. This city is to shine for the pilgrims on life's often complex journey. Pilgrims and tourists and doubters alike. We are called to shine, to invite, to bless.

We sit in Matthew 5 with others yearning to hear the teacher on the mount. And he begins with a word of blessing in what we today call the beatitudes which precede our text today. First a word of blessing "Blessed are...." And then a call to live that blessing "for they will be..." This culminates in Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you because of your faith in me...for your reward will be great in heaven.

To live the life of a Christian...to be the light of the world...the city on the hill with a unique story, we must first sit at the feet of Christ and receive his blessing for us in life.



Faith active in love begins with God and God's work in us in Christ. Our first call then to be light and to tell our story is to be people who receive. To sit at the feet of Jesus in worship is first and foremost an act of receiving. We are beggars it is true. So Luther said as he recognised the great truth of the faith that was missing in his day; that on our own we can do nothing to save ourselves but God in his grace comes to save us in the

sacrifice of Christ...a gift of forgiveness, a gift of grace and love, a gift of life. To be the light of the world and city on the hill with a story to share, we must first be beggars who receive eternal blessing.

Worship is the starting place. Look at what we receive freely...

Baptism/Invocation

Absolution

Good news in the Word which overcomes the darkness of sin, death, and devil, a meal of life, and the blessing of God as we prepare to leave. We are people of light. You are the light of the world...people who are truly blessed by Jesus and people called into action.



Hear Jesus. He says "You are..." You are salt and you are light. Jesus gives us our identity. You are the light of the world...you and me..us! and we have a call, a call to action. The world needs salt. The world needs light. And we are sent.

1. Our lives are: stations and vocations in family, in work, with friends...to be and bring the blessings of Christ on our words and deeds.
2. Our collective life as community gathered around Christ in worship as he teaches and blessed and sends us The city on the hill is you and me. Its us as individuals and its us as community. The city is meant to be seen so that pilgrims on the journey can find it.

What might this mean for us today?

I suggest that we revisit the first of two key themes and values we identified just over 12 months ago as God's people together:

Worship and spiritual purpose: Ensure that worship (word and sacrament) and prayer remain central, accessible, and meaningful to all members. Emphasis on intergenerational faith-sharing and deeper scriptural engagement.

Welcoming and belonging: Aspiration to be a welcoming and safe space for all people, particularly marginalised groups and those who feel distant from traditional church settings.

When Pastor Sue preached on January 4, she preached into the context of the Bondi terrorist acts. She preached on John 1 and said “John speaks honestly about darkness. He does not deny it or minimise it. “The light shines in the darkness,” he says, “and the darkness did not overcome it.” Notice that he does not claim the darkness disappears. The Gospel never asks us to pretend that violence, hatred, or fear are not real. But it does insist that they do not get the final word. We can shine the final word...a word of grace, a word of love, a word of inclusion and welcome

How are we called to be light for all people by our worship and our welcome to this worship and our community life together? Are we a city on a hill shining for all? Or do we hide ourselves?

Whatever you think of it, the people of Coventry Cathedral framed a statement of welcome to include people in the light. What would a St Paul’s welcome statement say about this place as a place where Christ comes to teach and to bless and for us to be a city of light which unites people in love?

Pastor Sue and I would love to hear your views on what is key not only to forming a statement of welcome but of what is key for us to be the light which welcomes children, pilgrims, tourists, sinners, like you and me.

Please take a moment now to provide some feedback on the form in the pew.

What would you include in a statement of welcome for people who come to St Paul’s?

What are the key things for us to be light which welcomes children, pilgrims, tourists and sinners to St Paul’s?

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid... let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven....Amen.

Video of the service including the above address can be found on the St Paul’s Lutheran Church Youtube page <https://www.youtube.com/@stpaulslutheranchurchboxhi1133>