

## **Sermon – Sunday, February 5, 2023**

**Rev. Randi**

When Jesus talks about the community of disciples being a light to a dark world, he uses a metaphor that would have been very familiar to Matthew's readers, who were Jewish Christians.

Being a light to the world was a covenantal responsibility. God had made a covenant to be Israel's God, and, in return, Israel had agreed to act in ways that blessed other people. The community was to share the Gospel through covenantal acts of mercy, love, and justice. As Christians, we know that we are unconditionally loved and are Christ's own forever. Out of gratitude, our community of disciples takes on the responsibility to reflect the light of the Christ to all the world.

William Temple, the Archbishop of Canterbury during most of World War II, wrote: "The church is the only organization on earth that exists for those who are not its members." [1] The mission of the community of disciples from the beginning through today is to be the light that allows those outside our community to see Jesus in us. To do that, sometimes we must go out into the world and engage with those in dark places, such as prisons, addictions, profound grief, and deep sickness. We reflect Jesus by acting as Jesus demonstrated – showing mercy, loving others no matter what, and bringing healing to the world.

Sometimes, the world responds readily to our show of mercy and love. Other times, they take advantage of us or laugh at us. Jesus experienced these same reactions in His ministry. Sometimes, folks flocked to his message of love and healing. Other times, they cried, crucify Him. Regardless of how we are received, we are called to reflect Jesus. We are called to make the world blessed.

Sometimes to radically reflect God in the world, we have to change our communal thinking. We must be willing to do things that might seem counterintuitive to what secular culture has taught us.

I want to share a story told by Andrew Foster Connors, a Presbyterian minister of a church in the city of Baltimore, MD. First, a fact about Baltimore: 2,500 people experience homelessness on any given night in Baltimore.

Here is Rev. Connors's story:

One year during Holy Week, a few Christians from well-endowed congregations in a major metropolitan area spent a night with homeless friends on the street. They were looking for the suffering Christ in the lives of those who spend their days and nights suffering from hunger, disease, and rejection. It was a chilly night, and rain rolled in close to midnight.

Looking for shelter, the handful of travelers felt fortunate to come upon a church holding an all-night prayer vigil. The leader of the group was a pastor of one of the most respected churches in the city. As she stepped through the outer doors of the church, a security guard stopped her. She explained that she and the rest of their group were Christians. They had no place to stay and were wet

and miserable and would like to rest and pray. Enticed by the lighted warmth of the sanctuary, she had forgotten that her wet, matted hair and disheveled clothing left her looking like just another homeless person from the street. The security guard was friendly but explained in brutal honesty, "I was hired to keep homeless people like you out."

As the dejected group made their way back into the misery of the night, they knew they had found their suffering Christ, locked out of the church. [\[ii\]](#)

This church that kept the homeless out probably was filled with caring people who regularly came to church and cared about their church. However, while trying to do beautiful worship to the Lord, the community of disciples in that Baltimore church forgot that the Gospel's essence is loving everyone. They also forgot their call to be a light in the darkness. And they forgot that the primary mission of the community of disciples has always been on those outside the community. If Jesus had been in that church, Jesus would have welcomed everyone, regardless of whether they were homeless. In fact, I picture Jesus not only offering them a place to rest and pray, but also food and a source of warmth.

Being a light of the world also means that, as a community of disciples, we are willing to go out into the darkest places with our message of hope. Pulitzer Prize-winning author Annie Dillard writes, "You don't have to sit outside in the dark. If, however, you want to look at the stars, you will find that darkness is necessary." [\[iii\]](#)

Jesus did not make us the light of the world for our own pleasure, any more than God made Israel a light for their own pleasure. Jesus made us the light of the world to shine in the darkness. Jesus made us the light of the world to help others.

As a community of disciples, we reflect the light of the Christ to the broken world.

[\[i\]](#) William Temple quoted by Cook, C. J. (2010). [Pastoral Perspective on Matthew 5:13–20](#). In D. L. Bartlett & B. B. Taylor (Eds.), *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Year A* (Vol. 1, pp. 334–336). Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

[\[ii\]](#) Connors, A. F. (2010). [Pastoral Perspective on Isaiah 58:1–9a \(9b–12\)](#). In D. L. Bartlett & B. B. Taylor (Eds.), *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Year A* (Vol. 1, p. 318). Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

[\[iii\]](#) Annie Dillard, in *Teaching a Stone to Talk: Expeditions and Encounters*. Harper Perennial, also quoted by Cook, C.J.

