

We are going to continue our series exploring God's heart through Jesus' parables by looking at the parable of the Lamp on the Stand. This morning, I want to really invite you to consider participating in the sermon. Several weeks ago at Camp Kirkmont, each family was given a box of brownie mix and encouraged to bake the brownies and share them with their neighbors. Hopefully you've had a chance to be neighborly in this way; since the parable we will be looking at is the parable of the Lamp on the Stand, and since we will be exploring what it means to let the light of the gospel shine out of us to those around us, I thought it would be really great to hear some of those stories and how they impacted you and your neighbors, or any other stories that you have of letting the gospel light shine out to those around you. So, after the sermon and response song we will have a time of sharing, like we do every week, and I really want to encourage you to share those brownie stories, or any other stories where you had the opportunity to be a neighbor.

Our parable for this morning is actually found in three of the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. This tells me that the Gospel writers found this particular teaching of Jesus to be significant. It's also very short and fairly simple. Yet, in terms of the function of the church and the mission of the church body, it is incredibly important. Before we dive into it, let's quickly read through each version of the Lamp on the Stand, and take note of any differences that you might hear.

**Mark 4:21**

<sup>21</sup> He said to them, "Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don't you put it on its stand?"

**Matthew 5:14-16**

<sup>14</sup> "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.<sup>15</sup> Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

**Luke 8:16**

<sup>16</sup> "No one lights a lamp and hides it in a clay jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, they put it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light.

One way that parables are often explained is as earthly stories with heavenly meanings. So, let's take a look at each of the elements that Jesus uses in this parable, discover what deeper spiritual meaning he was making, and consider how his words apply to us today.

**1) The Lamp**

What is the identity of the metaphorical lamp, and more importantly, what does the light that it emits represent? Scripture gives us three possibilities:

**The Gospel**

In Mark 4, in Luke 8 and 11, Jesus draws his listeners to the purpose of a lamp, that it emits light in order to illuminate darkness. He doesn't use any person specific language in the same way that he does in other passages, but if we think about the imagery of light against darkness, he is talking about good news, The Good News, in fact, which is the Gospel message.

### **The Church**

There is another possibility. In Matthew 5:14, Jesus calls the church "the light." "You are the light of the world." Jesus tells this parable in Matthew as a part of his Sermon on the Mount; the audience for this was most likely a Jewish audience, so it's conceivable that Jesus could have been reminding them of the prophet Isaiah's words in Isaiah 42:6, that part of God's calling to the Jewish people was that they were meant to be the "light to the Gentiles:" "I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles"

### **Jesus**

A final possibility is that Jesus himself is the light. He says in John 8:12 "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

So what does the lamp represent? Is it the Gospel? Is it the church? Is it Jesus? I'm going to suggest that it is "all of the above." Jesus is indeed the "light of the world" in that he turns death into life, despair into hope, and brings light into darkness. The gospel message is the good news about this light. We as a church are carriers of this light. So the lamp is the church, you and I, bearing the light of the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ who is the light.

What then is this Gospel light that we are bearing? If we are indeed lamps, it's important that we understand what it is that we should be shining. Oftentimes when we talk about the Gospel message today, we mostly mean salvation by means of Jesus' death and resurrection from the death we have incurred as a result of our sins. It's the most well-known verse from the Bible, John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

Now, this is absolutely a part of the Gospel message, but it is only one part of it. Think for a moment about what good news would have meant to the people Jesus was speaking to during his time. Remember that he had not yet died or come back to life, so what would this Gospel light have been? In **Luke 4:17-21**, Jesus gives us a clue about both the purpose of his ministry and ultimately the scope of the gospel message when he uses the words of the prophet Isaiah to speak to the crowd at the synagogue.

<sup>17</sup> And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, <sup>18</sup> "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed to *proclaim good news to the poor*. He has sent me to *proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed*, <sup>19</sup> to *proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*"

<sup>20</sup> And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. <sup>21</sup> And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

In this passage, Jesus controversially outlines his ministry to temple attendees by reading an important religious text in which the prophet proclaims all of these amazing things to happen to the people, things that they had been waiting on since their exile in Babylon, and he claims that they are now going to see these long-ago made promises come to be by his hand, a message which many in the crowd rejected.

So what is the good news of Jesus' ministry? He quotes five specific promises from the prophet Isaiah:

- Good news to the poor
- Liberty to the captives
- Recovery of sight to the blind
- Liberty to the oppressed
- Year of the Lord's Favor (year of Jubilee)

Good news, liberty, recovery of sight, and the Year of the Lords' Favor. This last one would have been especially significant, because the year of the Lord's favor referred to the Year of Jubilee, a Jewish yearlong celebration that was supposed to occur every fifty years in which slaves would be freed, debts forgiven, land returned to its original owner, God's mercy would abound, and no fields would be tilled or seeds planted. It was a year of leveling, in which all people would be brought back into fair and equal standing with one another, and a year of rest, both physically from labor, and also rest from the burdens of indebtedness, hardship, and struggle that followed those who weren't the wealthy or the slave-owners.

So, Jesus's Gospel news is not only that the afterlife will be good for those who believe in him, but that in this life here and now, those who are poor, oppressed, in captivity, are physically emotionally, mentally, or spiritually suffering will find grace, mercy and life in Jesus. And if we believe that these promises come true through Jesus, then that is truly, unbelievably Good News. So then, if we have believed and received this good news, what then should we do with it? Share it of course!

Last Monday, Erin and I got a call from our good friend Kate, who told us that she had some exciting news. She's a kindergarten teacher in Sidney and wanted to tell us that she had decided to retire from teaching and take up farming. Then she told us that she was just kidding, but that she did happen to win the tractor raffle at the Labor Day festival and found out a family friend was willing to buy it for \$2000. That was great news! And I was happy that she wanted to tell us.

Jesus tells us in Luke 8:16 and 11:33 that the purpose of this lamp is "so that those who come in can see the light." So, if the lamp is the church bearing the light of the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ who offers mercy in this life and the next, how is it that we can reveal this light?

## **2) How to Reveal the Light**

We reveal the light both in the way we choose to act and in the way we choose to speak, in our deeds and in our words. Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:16 <sup>16</sup> “In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” And he also says in Matthew 10:27 <sup>27</sup> “What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs.” It’s not enough to just live a Christian life or to serve others if we aren’t explicitly sharing Jesus’ words of mercy and hope. In the same way, if we are only verbally sharing Jesus but ignore the physical needs of those around us, we are like those who James speaks against in James 2:16: “If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?”

**Transition:** Jesus not only tells us that we are lamps, meant to illuminate the gospel of mercy to the world around us through our words and deeds, and reminds us that after all, the purpose of a lamp is to shed light into darkness, but he also drives the point home that there is no reasons to conceal the Gospel truth because all things hidden will eventually be revealed.

### 3) Hidden and Revealed

Jesus makes three arguments to persuade any of us “lamps” who have the gospel light as to why we should be working to uncover our light.

-First, we should uncover our lights because the hidden Gospel light is meant to be revealed: **Mark 4:22** <sup>22</sup> For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open.

-Second, we should uncover our lights because who we are inside will be revealed, both the good and the bad; if we know that what we hold inside, both the beauty of Jesus’ mercy and the ugliness of our sin will be made known, why would we not want to firstly continue to work towards Christlikeness so that our inner lights are something bright and glorious, and secondly to allow others to see that which gives us light and life? **Luke 8:17** <sup>17</sup> For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open.

-Third, we should uncover our lights because there is nothing to be afraid of; I would guess that one of the reasons that we might be hesitant to embrace sharing the Gospel is fear: fear of rejection, fear of failure, fear we won’t fit in. Jesus tells us that we don’t have to be afraid.

**Matthew 10:26-31** “So do not be afraid of them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.

**Transition:** So, we are all lamps, meant to illuminate the gospel of mercy to the world around us through our words and deeds, and there is no reason to conceal the Gospel truth because all things hidden will eventually be revealed.

### 4) Why preach a message so obvious?

The question then becomes, why would he preach a message that is so obvious it shouldn’t even need to be said, and why include it in three out of the four Gospels? That’s a fair question, but let’s answer that question with another question: how many here, can say with full confidence that their lives let the Good News of Jesus shine out unhindered, unfiltered, unblocked, and uncovered all of the time? I would venture to say that even the most spiritual

disciple among us has moments where he or she does not act as a lamp uncovered. So, Jesus shares this parable to remind us that in spite of any excuses we may have, God has called us to be lamps and we must let our lights shine.

Now, Jesus paints a pretty stark portrait between a lamp uncovered and a lamp covered; one is good, one is bad, one is useful, one is useless. But the reality is in the journey of Christian discipleship, that is, the path of those who claim to follow Jesus is long and has many steps, movements, and miles in between good and bad, useless and useful. So, I want to spend a few minutes looking at different kinds of lights and covers and considering other ways that we can block, obscure, hinder, hide, or change the Gospel light from what God intended.

\*Lamp: The Gospel light, uncovered, used to its full purpose, illuminating the dark.

\*Lamp under basket: The Gospel light completely covered, completely worthless.

\*Flashlight: bright, strong, but points only in the direction of the person controlling it, and leaves entire sections of darkness unlit.

\*Lamp in Colander and Yellow Bucket: the holes allow the light to shine through, but it doesn't have its full strength or power. I would guess this is where many of us are at, we allow the Gospel to shine through in certain areas but we hold back its full power.

\*Flashing bike safety light: This light is good, it still has a purpose, but the light is intermittent. And it's not a warm light, it's in your face, it's jarring. For some, their Gospel light might only come in quick bursts and be sharp and burning to those who see it. This is the person you know who doesn't speak to you for long stretches at a time but are suddenly concerned about the state of your soul, or who most lives a life completely away from God but occasionally becomes very self-righteous about their faith.

\*Color filters on light: The light is bright, it shines out, but it's filtered by the particular point of view/worldview of the lamp.

### **Conclusion:**

We have been given a great light; we are called not to hold that light only to ourselves, or to shine that light only to certain areas, but to let that light illuminate the darkness through our words and deeds so that those still trapped in that darkness can see and follow the light.

### **1 Peter 2:9-10**

<sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. <sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

God has not given a mission to the church; God created the church for his mission. The gospel light is his mission and we are the bearers of that mission. We have a responsibility to let that mission shine brightly in the community and world around us. What kind of lamp will you be?