# Let It Shine
## Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany, Year A - Matthew 5:13-20
*preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, February 9, 2014*

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

Some of you have met my younger son, Kyle most recently when he came through here on his way to seminary last fall – you know, the one who's a miraculous six-foot-six. He's a good boy and calls his mother or me on a fairly regular basis, just to catch up. Since he is studying some of the same stuff I did twenty-some years ago, in some of the same classrooms, I have a good time hearing how things are going at dear old VTS. One of those calls was Tuesday evening – or maybe it was Wednesday. Since the other thing I was doing that evening was looking at this morning's Lectionary readings, this particular visit reminded me of another night, many years ago, when *I* was in seminary and Kyle was still like four years old, and hadn't yet broken three-foot-tall.

I had hunkered down in my usual late evening mode – kicked back in my lounge chair – Bible to my right, stack of library books to my left, a glass of tea somewhere within reach, notebook in my lap (a three-*ring* notebook – the other kind hadn't been invented yet). I was, no doubt, struggling mightily with some great theological concept or some deep point of biblical exegesis – *or* watching reruns of *M\*A\*S\*H* – when all of a sudden, from the boys' room I heard the kind of paniced cry that sends a chill straight through any parent's heart, and I *ejected* from my chair and dashed down the hall. When I got there, Kyle was sitting bolt upright in his bed, his eyes wide with fear, his trembling arms wrapped around himself, his tiny chest heaving with sobs.

I dove to the side of the lower bunk and asked, "What's wrong, buddy?" As if he hadn't seen me until just that second, he grabbed me around the neck and cried, "Daddy, its *dark*." Sure enough, though I hadn't noticed on my way back to his room, as I looked up, I noticed that the bathroom light that we usually kept lit all night, had somwhow been turned off. "Turn on the light Daddy," my little boy whimpered, "Make it not dark."

I picked up Kyle in my arms – something that would do me serious bodily harm if I tried it today – and together we went, turned on the light, and made it "not dark". In the few steps back to his bed, I felt the tension flow from my little boy's body, and I literally *poured* him back into his bed. He kissed me and said, "Good night, Daddy." I seriously think he was asleep before I finished covering him up.

It has been years since we have left the bathroom light burning all night, but I'm pretty sure that my little boy is still not real happy about the house being dark. I know this because at fifty-mmmm years old, *I'm* still afraid of the dark. I was a *soldier* for thirteen years, for pity's sake, a veteran of a full-scale war. I've walked down pitch black roads through places I can't even pronounce. And even so, I have to confess that I'm not *particularly* comfortable taking the trash to the curb too late into a moonless night. And when I'm down here at the church late at night, and have to turn out the lights and lock up… well, I know with one hundred percent certainty that there is nothing and no *one* here once I've dowsed the lights, that wasn't there five seconds earlier, but I am very careful to flip the switches in the proper order, and I can't close the door quickly enough once that long hall goes dark. Sometimes I feel a *little* silly feeling that way, but I don't feel *too* bad, because I've read stuff written by really smart people that know all about human nature and all – you know, psychologists and psychotherapists and bartenders and such – and they say that we're *all* of us afraid of the dark.

One night, a couple of nights ago, or last night maybe, another child woke up crying in the night. Or maybe it will be tonight. Or maybe it happens every night – night after night after night, a child wakes up crying. Darkness surrounds her, suffocates her, strangles her. The darkness of fear. The darkness of hunger. The darkness of war, of abuse, of poverty. Perhaps she cries in the dark, but nobody – no Daddy,

no Mommy, *nobody* comes to comfort her. Nobody picks her up and holds her tight. Nobody turns on *any* light.

This world is a pretty dark place. There was a time when that wasn't so. There was a time – the Bible calls it Eden – there was a time before our pride turned all creation to a shadow of its created good. There was a time before we decided that what really mattered to us was whatever caught the fancy of our moment, there was a time when *everything* was ours. There was a time before we turned our backs on God's will for us, there was a time when men and women walked and talked with God in the cool of the evening. There was a time when the world was new, and fresh, and *right*. There was a time before *we* turned out the light.

During this season of Epiphany, the Church once again celebrates that the darkness into which we plunged ourselves at the dawn of our existence, has been pierced by the blazing light of Jesus Christ. We celebrate once more the light that shines in the darkness, the light that vanquished darkness, the light that darkness can *never* overcome. When we enter into relationship with Christ, when the light of Christ comes into our life, it drives out all the darkness.

Oh, we can and we *do* hide the brightness of that light, put it "under a bushel." We can and we *do* consciously, deliberately, *willfully* keep the brilliance of that light to ourselves. We can and we *do*, through inattention or neglect, let the flame smolder nearly to extinction.

But when we invite the light of Christ into our hearts, we are meant to let that spark set our *own* lives aflame. We are meant to live into that light until it grows and grows and grows within us. We are meant to end up positively *glowing* with the light of Christ's love. And we are meant to *share* that light with everyone we can reach. As we celebrate that light, as we look to see how that light might illuminate the darkness of the world around us, today's Gospel lesson puts the ball right into *our* court. "*You* are the light of the world," Jesus says. "Let your light shine before others that they may give glory to God." Oh sure, his immediate audience was the crowd gathered on the side of a hill to hear the revival preacher from Nazareth. But he's also talking to me. He's also talking to you. He's talking to each *one* of us who count ourself as his disciple. "*You* are the light of the world," he says, "Let *your* light shine."

One night, a couple of nights ago, or last night maybe, or tonight, every night – night after night after night, a child wakes up crying, surrounded by the darkness of fear. Who will turn on the light of Christ… for *her*?

Night after night, a man struggles, despairing of the darkness of wrong decisions made, of wayward paths taken. Who will shine the light of Christ's mercy and grace into the darkness of *his* soul?

Night after night, a mother lies awake wondering how her family will *ever* overcome the darkness of hunger, the darkness of abuse, the darkness of poverty. Who will shine the light of Christ's love into the darkness of *her* life?

Who will chase back the darkness of this dark world? Who will share the spark of Christ's love? Who will turn on the light, and make it "not dark"?

"*You* are the light of the world," he says, "Let your light shine." "Let in shine. Let in shine. Let in shine."