

Denice K. Leslie  
November 26, 2006  
Reign of Christ Sunday  
Second Stewardship Sunday "Gift and Task"  
Matthew 5: 13 – 16  
Romans 4: 13, 18 – 25

### **"Task: Blest To Be a Blessing"**

(Go to the communion table and lift one of the tall lighted candles):

What is the purpose of this candle? To give the wonderful warm glow of candlelight. Our lives are like this candle. God's spirit gives us the brightness of life.

How many hours do you suppose this candle will burn? It will eventually burn all the way down, or the wick will drown first in the melted wax.

How much time do you suppose you have here? None of us really know, do we? Our physical life is a gift with a limit. A gift to be used while we have it. That's quite a responsibility. We are stewards of what we will do with our gift of life.

Did you know Jesus was probably only about 30 when he died? He was probably only in ministry three of those years. Yet the light of his life, his ministry, his death and his resurrection outshine the brightest of the stars, a growing beacon in the darkness of our world.

In today's gospel lesson from Matthew 5, Jesus teaches us saying, "You are the light of the world." We think of Jesus as the Light of the World, don't we? But if we are Jesus' followers then we are all part of his Body, the Church.

A church is bigger than any one person. Jesus tells us, "A city built on a hill cannot be hid." As a child, didn't you love to sing "This little light of mine ... I'm going to let it shine ..."?

The only problem with that song is that it focuses exclusively on the single beam of light emitted by our small singular lights. Jesus wanted us to think corporately about the illuminating power he generates in each of us.

The "city built on a hill" is not noticed because one lone light flickers in a window. It

is the combined wattage of an array of lights, each burning in its own place, but for a common purpose, that sets the city ablaze in the midst of a dark and dreary night. From a jetliner at night the city of San Francisco, or Los Angeles or Sacramento looks like a thousand jewels spilled across the landscape. There is no hiding a lighted city, is there?

A church, then, is like a city—a city lighted on a dark night is composed of a many lesser lights shinning together for a common purpose—the mission of proclaiming and living out the good news of Jesus Christ.

Jesus has a good sense of humor. To further make his point he gives us one more illustration. He says, "No one after lighting a lamp puts it under a bushel basket, --pretty laughable if you stop to think about it—The lamp, he tells us, is set on a lamp stand so it gives light to all who are in the house." Its purpose is to give light—so why would anyone light it and then try to hide the light?

Why would anyone decide to follow Jesus and then chose not to live for him? God has lighted each of us and called us to be a part of Christ's body, the Church. Jesus is telling us it's as nonsensical for us to claim we love God and then fail to use our gifts in the service of God as it is for someone to light a lamp and then place it under a basket.

So Jesus concludes, *"In the same way, let your light shine before others, that seeing your good works, they may give glory to God."*

These are the words we say at a baptism when we present the person being baptized or the parents of the child being baptized with a lighted candle.

With the gift of God's love comes the task or mission of being a light in the darkness of our world. This is what it means to be a disciple. We are claimed by God, gifted with God's love, and given new life for the purpose of lighting our world. We are blest to be a blessing!

God blest Abraham *to be a blessing!*

God said, "Abraham I will bless you and multiply your descendants—*(that's us!)* and through you I will bless all the families of the

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earth! All the families of the earth! Wow. Through us God's plan is to bless all the families of the earth. We are to do that the same way God did it in Jesus.

God's presence in Jesus is all about how God chose to be in relationship with us. So it's all about *the way* in which we are in *relationship* with each other and all others in the world.

There's a quote from Walter Brueggemann in our stewardship insert in the bulletin, "Task," that says it perfectly:

*The good news calls our whole way of existence into question. If we are indeed (made) "in God's image," then the central task of our life is covenant-making and covenant keeping.*

*It is a promise both rich and heavy for us to say that finally we shall be like God....Our central human vocation is to be with brothers and sisters and for brothers and sisters. That is who God is. That is who we are called to be, expected to be, promised to be."<sup>1</sup>*

So...our task is to be with our brothers and sisters the way God was in Jesus with us. Today is Reign of Christ Sunday, the final day of the outgoing Christian Year when we lift up the Lordship of Christ over all of creation, over our lives.

To live our lives under the Reign of Christ is to "live in the joy of God" We know what a joy it is to be blest by God. We know how blest we are. Do we show it? Do others know it? You know that little song, "*If you're happy and you know it clap your hands—if you're happy and you know it clap your hands, if you're happy and you know it then your life will surely show it, if you're happy and you know it clap your hands!*"

To live under the Reign of Christ is "to live with one another in community." Living in community means sharing what gifts we have for the use of the community. "At the heart of Australian Aboriginal culture is, what is called

in English, 'the Dreaming.' In part this involves each member of the community carrying responsibility for the community's welfare. One member might have yam dreaming, another emu dreaming, another water dreaming. Each gift is essential to the survival of the community. Each gift is sacred, and shared.

The whole community is dependent on each person and the sacred gift they bring.<sup>2</sup> Each gift is like a small flame in the darkness bringing light and life to the community. It is the same with us as members of a Christian community. We are each one gifted with spiritual gifts given for the up building of the church.

Living under the Reign of Christ is to live *for* one another as sisters and brothers in God's love."<sup>3</sup> We know how to live for each other in this community. We are good care givers, good friends, good neighbors to each other. We pray for one another, we support each other in our times of need and we work along side one another.

We assume God's good rule is already present in the many blessings we enjoy together and as individuals. That being the case, for people such as ourselves, living under the Reign of Christ means letting go of an arrangement that benefits us and looking to the interests of others.<sup>4</sup>

That's not an easy thing to do. But then again, if salt has lost its flavor, what good is it? It is good for nothing but to be tossed out. You, Jesus says, are the salt of the earth. We, Jesus tells us, are the lighted city built on a hill. Blest to be a blessing in the darkness of this world.

Our Bishop and cabinet are setting a good example for us in bringing aid to the victims of Katrina. According to Eddie Frutchey

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<sup>2</sup> Stewardship, Gift and Task, p. 19, Logos Productions.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 2

<sup>4</sup> Paraphrase of material found in Task stewardship insert on p. 2.

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<sup>1</sup> Task, Walter Brueggemann.

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in the Conference United Methodists in Mission Volunteer office, in Sacramento, "This year we averaged about 4-6 teams a month from the conference area going to both Louisiana and Mississippi." Nancy Grace had quite a story featuring all the Methodist church volunteers working in the gulf area on CNN on Thanksgiving Day.

The ministry staff of the Conference will be one of the first teams heading to the Gulf region in January 2007. Bishop Beverly J. Shamana will lead the cabinet on the Volunteer Mission team that will work in New Orleans Jan. 8-13.<sup>5</sup>

The training they receive is provided by our apportionment dollars through our Conference Program as you can see from the insert in your worship folder this morning. I like the phrase printed at the bottom of the insert: "A portion for others" as a way of thinking about our apportionment giving.

As individual churches engaged in ministry and mission to our own communities we are also united together through our United Methodist connection -- a big lighted city built on a hill -- a huge light in the darkness offering hope to the hopeless, new life to the despairing and forgotten all over this nation and around the world.

God calls us to use our gifts, our resources on behalf of those of our brothers and sisters in this world who are in need, the oppressed, the imprisoned, the disaster stricken, the homeless, the war weary, the hungry, the veteran, the lonely, the confused, the lost, those living on the streets of our town...

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<sup>5</sup> The Instant Connection for November: Cal-Nevada already has teams scheduled through February. And more teams are needed. Team leaders for UMVIM teams are provided training through the conference. Frutchey says any church interested in setting up a team for 2007 can contact the UMVIM office at (916) 374-1584.

*Lyrics: There is a candle in every soul,  
some brightly burning, some dark and cold.  
There is a Spirit Who brings a fire, ignites a  
candle and makes His home.*

*So carry your candle, run to the  
darkness, seek out the hopeless, confused and  
torn.*