

I love this service. I love the excitement of bringing light into the dark church and the telling of stories and singing of songs gathered around the ritual flame. Tonight we remind ourselves that we are the people of God, as we recount our salvation history, renew our vows and then celebrate the first Eucharist of Easter, the foretaste of the heavenly banquet when we will all be gathered together and all will be restored in balance and justice in the new kin-dom of God.

There have been no candles in the church and no light in the tabernacle since yesterday when we re-member Jesus dying on the cross. With his death, the light of the world went out.

But tonight, tonight, the new flame is lit, the new fire and the Pascal candle, symbol of our baptism, symbol of our new life in Christ, symbol of Christ the light of the world, is brought back into the church, into the place of worship and all our candles are lit from that one “marvelous and holy flame.” The darkened church is lit by the new light of Christ and by all our little candles – the light of the world is returning and we are the light of the world.

Jesus said “I am the light of the world” and he also said “You are the light of the world.” In our baptism we have died and been raised with Christ and we are become the light of the world. Let’s try some call and response. Who are we? ***We are the light of the world.***

How did that feel? What difference does it make to know that we are the light of the world? Jesus told us not to hide that light, not to put it under a bushel basket or lock it in a storage unit but to put it on a lampstand where everyone can benefit from it. I wonder how you hide your light? What is the storage unit where you hide it? Is it shame, fear, embarrassment or simply unbelief?

Now remind me, Who are we? ***We are the light of the world.***

Isn't that astonishing? we with all our failings, our foibles and our frustrations, we are called to be the light of the world. We are the ones to whom Jesus has given the new flame, we are the ones who are to spread the good news of reconciliation with God. But Jesus gave us much, much more than a new flame. Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit, the wind beneath our wings, the breath to blow on the flame and set us on fire with passion and joy and a burning desire to bring peace and justice to our world.

Who are we? *We are the light of the world.*

It is our privilege and our calling to set the world alight with the love and joy of Jesus. That doesn't necessarily mean doing something different from what we normally do every day – but it means doing it in cooperation with Spirit. Each of us can minister in the situation in which we find ourselves, whether that's work or family, even if we live alone. God can move in and through the relationships we have with our friends, with our neighbors, with our pets. God can move in and through our thoughts and prayers.

But God is always gracious and does not force herself on us. You are probably familiar with the 19<sup>th</sup> century painting by William Holman Hunt entitled , “The Light of the World.” Here we see Jesus knocking at an overgrown door. He is carrying the light, but has to wait for the door to be opened because the handle is on the inside.

We have the tremendous privilege of being able to open the door and invite God into our lives - or further into our lives. We can invite her into the living room of our minds, or into the kitchen... perhaps we will offer him the guest room... or perhaps yes perhaps into the inner sanctum – the bathroom of the master bedroom.

It is when we dare to let Christ into the most intimate and private places that the light really begins to shine, and that's not always a comfortable thing. If I invite you into my house there are many closets and drawers that I will not want to open for you. Because they are a mess. As you know, I'm not a neat-nic. I started this year planning to go through 1 or 2 messes every weekend until I had sorted and cleaned every pile, every bag, every drawer and bookshelf. That was before the fountain developed in the bathroom wall. Three months later, I still have three bags of things which I took out of the bathroom vanity before it went to the landfill. If you come to my house, I'm not going to give you a flashlight and let you go through those bags.

But when we allow Jesus to open the bags of our innermost messes, and to shine his light in there, his grace brings healing, and the more we allow him to heal us the more the light will shine out through us and that's important. Because the world needs light.

Who are we? *We are the light of the world.*

We are the light of the world. Alone, one little candle gives very little light, but together we can cause a brilliant conflagration. Tonight we will renew our baptismal vows. These are our commitment to be that light. Together we can help each other to be accountable, we can support one another in living out our vows, into making them a reality, and in doing so our light will shine with the love and peace and justice of the Christ.

I want to close with a poem written by spiritual teacher Marianne Williamson,

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.  
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.  
It is our light, not our darkness  
That most frightens us.

We ask ourselves  
Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?  
Actually, who are you *not* to be?  
You are a child of God.

Your playing small  
Does not serve the world.  
There's nothing enlightened about shrinking  
So that other people won't feel insecure around you.

We are all meant to shine,  
As children do.  
We were born to make manifest  
The glory of God that is within us.

It's not just in some of us;  
It's in everyone.

And as we let our own light shine,  
We unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.  
As we're liberated from our own fear,  
Our presence automatically liberates others.

Who are we? *We are the light of the world.*