

How Is Your Light Shining?
Matthew 5:13-20
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
February 8, 2026
Rev. Jill Cameron Michel

It has been said that as many as 90% of New Year's resolutions fail before January is over. And, no, here in early February I am not going to ask how many you have kept or how quickly those that have been forgotten went by the wayside.

But, I do want to take us back to those Sundays around the turn of the calendar, particularly Sunday, December 28. It's not that we spent time that day setting resolutions for 2026. But what we did do was talk about the light and the way it calls us to live. And many of us, as a new year was dawning, inevitably began to think about the commitments we would make to living as the light in 2026.

That day during Children's Moment, as a reminder to the children that we are called to be light in this world, I handed out lanterns. And in the weeks that followed, many of you also picked up a lantern as the extras were left out to share.

These lanterns are not magic, but they are reminders - in the same way that the candle in our worship space is - reminders that light is a powerful thing, and also reminders that light is a symbol of God's presence not only around but also within us.

Now today's scripture was full of multiple images and topics. You are the salt. You are the light. And then Jesus went on talking about both himself as a fulfillment of the law and also our call to be righteous.

Here's the reality...we could spend hours unpacking the content of this scripture. In fact, over the course of three sections of our Discovering the Bible class and one session of our Wednesday Bible study, a number of us have spent a lot of time talking about it recently.

However, the main thing I want to point out today is that everything that is mentioned in this reading is about relationships. So, let me say a couple

quick things about the other parts of this text before we turn back to the section on light.

Our reading began with salt. “Salt is not an element useful to itself,” writes Dr. Emerson Powery, “Its value comes in its application on other things. So, likewise the followers of Jesus are called to exist for others” ([Commentary on Matthew 5:13-20 - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary](#)). You are the salt. And this is lived out in relationship.

And at the end of this reading, when Jesus talked about the law and the importance of righteousness, again, we mishear this if we hear it being about following rules to a “t” for the sake of following rules or even for the sake of being deemed righteous.

Rather, if we remember that the law refers not only to laws and rules, but to the whole of the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, then we also know that this is all about covenant. The law isn’t about rules, but it is about how to best live in covenant relationship, loving God and our neighbors. Fulfilling the law...living with righteousness...again, this is not a solitary action, this is not about personal piety, but it is a reality lived out in relationship.

And then - in the middle of this reading - there is the light.

“Scripture is filled with images of the divine light...of God’s light...of Jesus as light to the world. *But* it is also filled with images of us, ordinary people, as a source of light for others” (Rev. Jill Cameron Michel, “Being the Light” a sermon for December 28, 2025).

And that is so important for us to remember. After all, during Christmas we celebrate Jesus as the light. During Epiphany we talk about the light of God shining in the world for all.

But none of these is separate from us. Because ours is a relational God. Ours is a God who the creation stories tell us bent down and molded humans from the earth, breathed life into people, and journeyed in relationship with us ever since.

Ours is a relational God, a God who we have seen most clearly through the person of Jesus, an open channel to God’s love, one who lives with

compassion and mercy, with truth and courage, with regard for all of those around him.

And every week, at least once in worship (often more than that) we remind ourselves that we are called to live in Jesus' ways. *If* we don't say it any other time, we say it at the table. We remind ourselves that when we eat of the bread, we commit our bodies to continue Jesus' work in this world.

So, while we might remember Jesus saying, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12), we need to also remember these words from Jesus in Matthew's version of the Sermon on the Mount, "You are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14).

Each summer since moving back to Iowa I have had the privilege of serving at CYF camp at the Christian Conference Center. I spend a week every July with high school students and every year I come back having been reminded what fabulous humans teenagers are.

One of the things that we do at church camp is that each night our leadership group chooses two of their fellow campers to present with lanterns. As we prepare to go to campfire, the leaders who serve on our regional youth council announce who will carry the lanterns and lead us to campfire. They don't draw names out of a hat. They don't choose randomly. Rather their job is to watch all day and to notice when one of the other campers is shining the light of God's love into our little community.

It might be that one of the campers did something helpful in the middle of a difficult situation. It might be that the youth from the council noticed the kindness that simply seeps out of another in all their interactions. It might be that there was a moment when that camper said something that offered special insight for others. And because they are watching, it is not unusual for a camper who might otherwise fly under the radar to be chosen because even in little ways they have been shining the light. Every day it is something a little different. But we end each day with a moment of naming the way campers are shining the light into our world.

So what about us?

"There are many ways that we can be the light. Sometimes it looks like love. Sometimes it looks like courage. Sometimes it looks like a listening

ear. Sometimes it looks like being God's people in the midst of a hurting world" (Rev. Jill Cameron Michel, "Being the Light" a sermon for December 28, 2025).

So, this is my question. And, admittedly, it might be uncomfortable to answer because we are taught to step out of the spotlight, to not toot our own horns. But my question is this: How is *your* light shining?

Because it is. Remember, Jesus didn't say, "You might become the light someday." Jesus didn't say, "Strive to be the light." Jesus claimed light as part of our identity. We aren't waiting to become the light, because we already are.

You are the light.

And, friends, this world needs light.

So, how is your light shining?

Perhaps your light got up early on Tuesday, bundled up in warm clothes, and stood on the lawn of the ICE office in Cedar Rapids to bear witness to the plight of our immigrant neighbors.

Perhaps your light was sitting at the bedside of a dying loved one whispering words of hope and encouragement even as you grieved your own loss.

Perhaps your light went out of the way this week to listen to the story of someone who is struggling and to find ways that you can offer support and care.

Perhaps your light stood up with words of truth in the face of lies that are getting too much press.

Perhaps your light sat down at a table in the school cafeteria or a work breakroom to share a meal with a new friend.

Friends, you are the light of the world. How is your light shining? Where will your light lead you this week?