

STAINED GLASS  
Matt. 5:14-16 NRSV, The Message, 2 Cor. 4:6-7 NRSV  
October 28, 2018 St. Paul's UMC / Nov. 4, 2018 Covenant UMC  
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**MOMENT OF REMEMBRANCE**

November 1st is All Saints Day. A day of remembrance for the “saints” who have passed away this year. We’ll use that term “Saints” loosely, for anyone who has passed away this year, whether they were saintly, or not! In a moment I will name the people connected with our congregation who have passed away. But I also encourage you to take time to remember others who have passed away this year. I have set up candle stations for you and I invite you to come forward at any time in the service, and light a candle in memory of people who have passed away. As you light the candle, celebrate the life they lived and how they shined their light in this world. But also, use this moment to let go. Let go of any pain, resentment, anger you may carry toward the person. And, while you are here, notice the colorful glass. You will see the connection later in the service.

In a similar fashion, as I call out the names of our St. Paul’s saints, reflect on how each one shined their light in this world. And let go of the pain connected with the person.

Hear now the names of those who have passed away this year: Laurie Skillman, Margaret Weedman, William Schmidt, Carol Martin, Glenda Thiele, Dan Martin, Chris Duncan, Matt Dale, Edna Cotton, Sue Northrup, and Hanna Henderson.

Let us pray: *“God of life and death, we bless your holy name. We thank you for these saints who, having finished their earthly life, now reside in your presence. We thank you for the legacy they deposited into this congregation. We thank you for the influence they had on us individually. Give us grace to follow the example of their steadfastness and faithfulness. Give us courage to let go of our pain. And grant us comfort and strength as we continue on this journey of grief. We pray in the name of Jesus, who teaches us that death is not the end in your love. Amen.”*

I invite you to take a moment to greet one another. It is also a good time to come forward and light a candle.

**SERMON**

“In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” (Genesis 1:1-3 NLT)

God is the source of all light. In fact, in the Old Testament light came to signify the very presence of God.

The creation story continues in Genesis 1:26-27 (NRSV):

And God said, “Let us make humankind in our image according to our likeness. ... So God created humankind in his image. Male and female God created them.”

I believe every single person reflects the image of God. None of us is a complete revelation of God, but each of us reflects a portion of who God is in our own unique way. Thus, there is inherent worth, and dignity, and value in every single human being.

Jesus combined these two concepts of light and being created in the image of God, in the Sermon on the Mount when he taught. Listen to the words of Matthew 5:14-16 NRSV, **14** “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. **15** No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. **16** In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

What is important to note here is that Jesus isn't asking us to be light, he is stating that we are light. We are to accept and live out this reality. This is not a challenge to try harder to be light but a statement that as followers of Jesus, we are light for the world. The more we allow the light of Christ into our lives, the more we will reflect the glory of God. For God has chosen to illuminate this world with love and grace through us. In fact, God is present to the world in us.

Sometimes it helps us see a biblical truth anew by hearing it in another translation. Eugene Peterson wrote his own translation of the Bible called *The Message*. His intent was to put the ancient words of scripture into modern day vernacular, so that common people might understand it better. He grew up and retired in Kalispell, Montana. He is one of the saints for us to remember this year, for he passed away just this week (10/22/18). Listen to these words about being light from *The Message*.

**14-16** "Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven."

That same light that God created at the beginning of the world, shines in and through us. We are light-bearers, bringing out the God-colors in the world.

And so, on this All Saints Day, as we remember those who have passed away this year, or anytime, let us reflect on how each person shined their light? How did they impact the world, those around them? How did they influence you?

Now, I think sometimes we glorify people in their death. We often talk about those who have passed in glowing colors, leaving out the details of imperfection in their lives. I think that does a disservice to them, and to us. It is good to recognize the greatness and faults in each person. For, God does not expect us to be perfect. God knows we have flaws. God knows we make mistakes. But notice, in Matthew, Jesus doesn't say, "those of you who have cleaned up your act, YOU are the light of the world." He doesn't say, "those of you who are perfect, YOU shine your light." No, Jesus puts no qualifiers on the call to shine our light. Each one of us, each person, has a light to shine in this world. Just as we are. Each of us like a tiny piece of a stained glass window. We each shine our own unique color, shade, hue. No two lights are the same, which makes for a glorious display!

I think Paul had a similar idea in mind when he wrote 2 Cor. 4:6-7 NLT. **6** For God, who said, "Let there be light in the darkness," has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ. **7** We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves." Or, as Eugene Peterson translates in *The Message*:

"It started when God said, "Light up the darkness!" and our lives filled up with light as we saw and understood God in the face of Christ, all bright and beautiful. If only you look at us, you might well miss the brightness. We carry this precious Message around in the unadorned clay pots of our ordinary lives. That's to prevent anyone from confusing God's incomparable power with us." 2 Cor. 4:6-7 *The Message*

It is nothing short of a miracle, a work of God, that the glory of God can be seen in our ordinary imperfect lives. Truly, it is easier to see God's image in some people than others, every person is a mixture of light and darkness, nevertheless, everyone is created in the image of God and uniquely reflects a piece of the glory of God.

As I was reflecting, I remembered a story I read in a book for my DMin studies. It went something like this. The author toured Europe and was impressed by the majesty and beauty of the grand cathedrals, especially the stained glass windows. (I do have to say that I am also awestruck by the stained glass windows in the Cathedral just up the hill here in Helena.) Anyway, one day he went into an abandoned cathedral. It has not been kept up. In fact, vandals had hit it. And much of the stained glass was broken. It dampened his spirit, to see the majestic beauty broken. But then something caught his eye. He looked to the ground and there was a pile of broken glass that the sun was shining on. And it was beautiful in its

own way. The light refracting through the broken glass was just as beautiful as the light shining through the intact glass of the windows. And then he realized, that is how God shines light in us and it lifted his spirit and gave him hope. There are days we feel like a tiny piece of a stained glass window, a bright red, or a deep blue, or a pink skin tone. For we each reflect our own color, which I think changes on a daily basis. Other days, we might feel more like the broken glass on the floor, nonetheless, God shines light in us and through us, even in our brokenness and it is beautiful in its own way.

As we remember the "saints", let us remember them as whole people, beautiful, flawed, glorious and broken. That may require we do some letting go as we remember them. Let go of our anger, let go of our pain, let go of our resentment. For, no one can go through life without hurting others. When they die, that pain can remain. We need to let it go. Like the leaves of Fall. For the snow and ice are coming. And if we cling onto our leaves, they will weigh us down and strain our branches in winter. So, remember. Remember how people shone their light uniquely in this world. But also let go. Let go of that which weighs us down. Then we will be able to see the beauty of God's glorious love and grace in each person. In their wholeness and in their brokenness.

God has chosen to illuminate this world with love and grace **through** us, through our unadorned claypots, in our ordinary imperfect even broken lives. So shine your light in this world boldly! Be true to yourself, and shine your light brightly in this world.

We all look like stained glass window panes when the light of God shines through our lives. And collectively, we create a beautiful image of God.

So, let us honor those who have passed, who shined their light into our lives, by shining our light brightly.