

Light. In Jesus' day, the Jews were a culture within a culture, Judaism inside the powerful Roman Empire. The Jews had thousands of years behind them, a long tradition of being faithful in difficult circumstances. They had always counted on the light from God in some form...pillar of fire to guide them through the deserts, the fire of the message of the prophets. These chosen people did have the light of God, through history, through tradition, and through the Torah, their Holy Book.

And then this young upstart with a few healing gifts comes along...and is about to cause this nation everything. You don't just say things like "I am the light of the world" or, worse....bring together the riff raff, the jazzed up prostitutes, druggies, and lower class people and announce that THEY are the light of the world! "There's trouble in River City" when that happens!

It's easy to preach Light to the lost if you've never struggled with their darkness! That's why I have problems with TV preachers, but let's stay focused on the first century Palestinians for a moment. God's light and love reached down to this earth through his own son, Jesus—born in a manger,

raised in a synagogue, worked as a carpenter, he knew ALL OUR TEMPTATIONS and remained sinless. Therefore, he was hated and killed, dead for three days and rising from the dead, Jesus conquered Death. Love is stronger than Death, and offers us, through His victory, a door to Eternal life. That's the Gospel---that's- the Light= that's GOOD NEWS!

Light. Martin Luther King had a dream....that one day people would be judged based upon the content of their character instead of the color of their skin. He dreamed that the Church of Jesus Christ would stand up and not let the status quo control its destiny. He was a light because Christ burned in his heart and soul and spirit and SHOWN through this modern prophet. He was not perfect, but he was forgiven, and so HE, like Christ, was martyred.

Then integration happened. Today, many Evangelical Christians are having trouble with a black president. MLK preached **grace and nonviolent love**.

In a land obsessed with guns and violent entertainment, I think we've let him down. Church. When we Mennonites, who have known persecution and who **say** peace is our centerpiece, but stay "the quiet in the land" when policemen pull out their guns and kill black youth, troubled though they may be. I think we've let him down. When we don't band together to make statements that condemn violence, we become the crowd that shouted,

‘Crucify Him’ and our lights are dimmed. When we choose to passively support a military that continues to bomb weddings in the name of our safety, our lights are dimmed. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.” Becky Pettit in her study of the Myth of Black Progress, shows with her data that nearly 70 percent of young black men will find themselves behind bars at some point in their lives. “Stand your ground” laws, in my opinion, give the bigot a reason to say, “I...don’t....feel....safe” and then pull out and USE a gun with little fear of arrest or imprisonment. LIGHTS are for SHINING! Love means speaking up!

Jesus tells his disciples in the Matthew Sermon on the Mount that lights don’t magically end up underneath bushels. No, WE choose to cover up our lights! Jesus says, “No one after lighting a lamp puts it under a bushel!” That’s ridiculous! Jesus is clear: We make the choice to be victims of our self-selected bushels. What’ my bushel? What’s yours? (Is it inferiority, busy-ness, wealth and things, etc.) In many ways, we choose bushels to be our identity. And some of us hide under our bushels, saying things like “I’m not cut out to be a bright light. Let someone else do that.”, when in reality,

Jesus calls all of us resist anything that blocks the light, any bushel of ours or others' making. We cannot give over energy, time, or power to the Dark side! Sometimes this dark side is of our own making, a self-deprecation that follows us through life! "Let your light SHINE before others!"

For some of us, our bushel may be the church bubble! Some choose the "Feel-Good of a church and never venture beyond its doors!

Others may gravitate to a church or a faith with no boundaries, where anything goes, as long as I don't get caught. This bushel is very seductive, leading us to think that "looks count"- all is positive and good on the outside, but if there isn't any holy, concrete change in our lives, then we enter into a sort of "magical Disney Kingdom" kind of thinking. That light is artificial. It is not connected to the real and staying POWER of a heavenly Father who lovingly invites us to tend our sexual boundaries, tend our bodies, tend our ethics, and call each other-lovingly and persistently-to the standards of our Heavenly Father, our heavenly CONDUCTOR of light. WE ARE IN THE LIGHT TOGETHER.

Some hide under the bushel of "Actions speak louder than words, so I choose not to speak about my faith." Good news, friends, does come in deeds, but also in words. "Be prepared, Peter says, "to give the reason why

you are a lightbulb” (and I paraphrase), “should someone ask”. And they **will** ask! Do you mumble something about having great parents, or a great opportunity because of your wealth or education? Do you give credit to your God? Why **are** you a light? ( If someone has not asked you why you are “different”, maybe it’s because you’ve not ventured into the darkness!) You’ve stayed in the bubble.

Why is **Summit** a Light? If we cannot verbalize the Source of our light, in grateful, humble, authentic ways, then it will be hidden, the silence becoming a bushel. According to Alvin Ried, author of the recent book *The Radically Unchurched* , almost 41% of America’s population falls into this category- and we have the Light that can penetrate this dark culture. It is the good news of the gospel! God does not want an anxious, fractured church!

Have you studied it this week? Jewel Longenecker of AMBS shocked some Mennonite leaders, I think, recently when she suggested that fewer and fewer of us actually engage in daily Bible study. Like Keith Green used to sing, “You love the world, but you’re avoiding ME!” We’re talking about the lack of “searching the scriptures”. This effects our wattage! If this fits your description, then change it! In Advent, we will be studying scriptures

for 45” together- lectio divina and discussion- for four Thursday evenngs, followed by a half an hour Taize service. Sharing new ways of understanding will help us to grow in the Kingdom and help others to grow. Verbalizing your faith as a result of Direct Light from personal and group Bible study charges your batteries and provides light through you to others.

Who is your light? “Christ BE our light”, we sing...It is more than being nice, or bright, or polite. It is the light of Christ that invites, that fascinates, that gives and gives and persistently and sacrificially gives to others, to the Church, to strangers. One candle shines brightly, but many candles, shining together, become a bright light on the hill and the flames of the Holy Spirit cannot be quenched. We cannot do it on our own, we need lights around us, the community that Jesus modeled, welcoming the lost from death to life, from shame to forgiveness, from wandering spiritually to coming home to God’s blessed way of living and loving. [Rice basket and LED light demo.]

In the Message, Eugene Peterson puts verses 15 and 16 like this: “Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up to God, this generous Father in heaven!”

So, live the lit-up life! Stay current! Staying Current! Plugged into the Power of Love incarnate! The ultimate and unending Current of Christ.