

The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany, 6 February 2011  
Saint James Episcopal Church, Tigard OR  
The Rev'd Raggs Ragan, Rector

Last week we heard the Beatitudes. Today, we hear the next section of the Sermon on the Mount, including the wonderful lines, "You are the light of the world. ... let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

The cover illustration on the bulletin, with its candles of assorted sizes and shapes reminiscent of our Taizé candles, is meant to call this to mind, to encourage us to think of ourselves as the light of the world, each our own unique way, and to ponder how this might be lived out.

It is especially appropriate to have this lesson right after Candlemas, that wonderful celebration of candles and light. The candles which will light our worship for the coming year were blessed in our Candlemas celebration. This ancient rite dates from the middle of the fifth century and has inspired and delighted people down the centuries. We blessed the wax candles and the liquid wax which fuels our newer candles, asking God to shed his glory on us through them, to use them to light our way to Him and to our true selves. The blessing of candles was developed as a whole separate rite unto itself, not part of the days' Eucharist or any of the regular 'Hours'. It is an important and special celebration and blessing of light.

For us in our electrified world, candles still represent light to see by, but a particular light, a light which makes things more special, a light which calls us to quiet and attention. So we have candles at dinner, especially when it is a festive occasion, we have candles for romance, we have candles for prayer, we have candles for peace, we have candles to remember the dead.

We love the special light of candles. But each year at Candlemas we are reminded that we are God's candles – we are the light of the world. At least that is what God invites us to be.

This idea of being candles is a rich image. First, of course, there is the light, light which lets us find our way, find things, find one another. Then there is the fact that a candle is expended in providing light. If we live our lives as truly God's candles, then all that we are will be gradually used up in God's service, providing light for the world. And at our death, the last of our wax is consumed as our light here ends and we are joined to the original light, the source of our life.

I encountered a wonderful example of living as God's candle this week. At Tuesday's Evangelism meeting, one of our members spoke of her work teaching young children to read. She said that each time she approaches a day of teaching, she prays to God for guidance, "because these are your children". That clear vision of each child as God's own beloved child must surely communicate itself to the young students. She is surely a light for each of them, shedding God's nurturing light of love and acceptance.

"You are the light of the world," Jesus tells us. You are the ones who can shine on people letting them know they are loved, that they matter in this vast universe.

- Each time you sincerely thank someone, you are a light to them.
- Each time you stand up for someone who is being treated unfairly or cruelly you are a light to them and to the people doing wrong.
- Each time you make things a little easier for your neighbor or your mother or a stranger, you are a light to them.
- Each time you carry someone's packages, or hold open a door, or offer a ride, you are a light.

- Each time you express your admiration or appreciation for someone's talents or accomplishments, you are a light.

As I was thinking about how we can live our lives as living lights, I remembered my favorite Valentine's Day story *Somebody Loves You, Mr Hatch* by Eileen Spinelli.

Mr Hatch was tall and thin and he did not smile. He lived a life of strict routine. Every morning at 6:30 sharp he would leave his house and walk to the shoelace factory where he worked. At lunch time he would sit in a corner and eat his cheese and mustard sandwich all alone. After work he would make two stops: at the newsstand to get the paper and at the grocery store to buy a fresh turkey wing for his supper. After supper he read the paper, took a shower, and went to bed early.

One Saturday, the postman surprised Mr Hatch with a great big package. Mr Hatch had never spoken to the postman before, but he smiled and said, "Thank you, Mr Goober." Mr Hatch opened the package and found a huge red heart-shaped box filled with candy. And on the box was a little card which said, "Somebody loves you."

Mr Hatch did not have any friends and wondered, "Who would send me a Valentine?" He put the box on the coffee table and tried to go on with his normal Saturday chores, but every time he left the room he had to keep peeking to see if the box was really there. He kept hearing, "somebody loves you." over and over. "I have a secret admirer!!" he thought with amazement.

Mr Hatch laughed out loud, a thing he had never done before. He laughed and danced and clapped his hands, and ate a piece of candy. Mr Hatch put on a clean shirt and a yellow polka-dotted tie. Then he went out for a walk, hoping to meet the person who sent him the candy. No one had ever seen Mr Hatch wearing a tie or smiling, so he attracted a lot of attention. People tripped over their dogs and fell off paint ladders they were so startled. Mr Hatch cheerfully waved hello to everyone.

On Monday at work, Mr Hatch sat in the middle of the cafeteria and talked with everyone and offered everyone chocolates from his box.

On the way home, as usual, he stopped at the newsstand. Mr Smith handed him the usual newspaper. "I would also like a pack of mints please," said Mr Hatch.

Mr Smith was shocked. "Did you say something, Mr Hatch?"

"Yes, indeed, Mr Smith, I would like some mints. And pardon me, but are you feeling all right?" Mr Smith admitted that he was feeling sick and was supposed to go to the doctor, but the stand had been so busy he hadn't been able to get away. Mr Hatch smiled and volunteered to take care of the newsstand while Mr Smith went to the doctor.

When Mr Smith returned, Mr Hatch went to his usual grocery store and asked for ham instead of his usual turkey wing. Then he said to the grocer, "You look worried, Mr Todd." Mr Todd explained that he was worried about his little girl who was late coming from school and that he could not leave the grocery store. So Mr Hatch went out and found the little girl, to Mr Todd's great relief.

After supper Mr Hatch decided to bake brownies to take to the factory next day. Neighborhood children were attracted by the yummy smell and so Mr Hatch brought the brownies out into the yard along with fresh lemonade. Soon the neighborhood children and their parents were all having a picnic of brownies and lemonade in Mr Hatch's yard. Mr Hatch got out his old harmonica and played songs while everyone sang and danced.

From then on Mr Hatch was always smiling and laughing, helping people and throwing parties. He forgot all about finding the person who sent the valentine.

Then one day, Mr Goober came to the house and said, “Oh, Mr Hatch I made a mistake and my supervisor is very angry with me. You know that package I brought you on Valentine’s Day? I delivered it to the wrong house. I’m sorry.”

Mr Hatch sadly gave the postman the empty red heart-shaped box and the little card which said, “I love you.”

After Mr Goober left, Mr Hatch sighed to himself, “Nobody loved me after all.” He went to bed early. The next day at lunch time he sat alone in a corner and ate his cheese and mustard sandwich. After work he stopped at the newsstand for his paper, but he did not speak to Mr Smith. He stopped at the grocery store for his turkey wing, but he did not smile at Mr Todd. He did not bake brownies or have parties or play his harmonica any more.

Everyone wonder what was wrong until Mr Goober told them. And everyone said, “But we love Mr Hatch.” They remembered all of the nice things he had done and what a nice person he had been.

“Poor Mr Hatch, what can we do?”

Then Mr Goober got an idea. On Saturday, when Mr Hatch went out to sweep his porch he found it full of paper hearts and ribbons and boxes of candy. There was a shiny silver harmonica. His front yard was filled with people, holding up a huge sign, which said, “Everybody loves Mr Hatch.” At first Mr Hatch was so moved that tears ran down his face, then he smiled and laughed and then he went down to join the party.

A mistake shone light into Mr Hatch’s life and turned him from a fleeting shadow into a shining candle for his whole town. And when his light was dimmed by disappointment, all the people whose lives he had brightened shone for him.

Being one of God’s candles is a joy and it is contagious.

Each time you leave church, imagine yourself carrying candles out into the world, candles for love and service. Go forth to be light wherever you are, be a candle to light the way for people to find their way to peace and love and joy and God and community. Amen.

How are we the light of the world? Who is the light?

Shirley: each day before teaching children to read, praying that God will be with her – because these are your children.

Stones: great deficit to not have someone to admire you.

See ourselves as candles or LEDs – what kind of light are we shining – are we hiding our light under a bushel

Candlemas – carrying candles in procession; carrying candles out into the world – which we are meant to do every time – ite missa est – go forth with your candles – go forth for love and service – go forth to be light wherever you are – blessed for the year – light the way for people to find their way to peace and love and God and community – light lets us find one another, find things

I want to conclude with a poem written in 1943 by the monk Thomas Merton entitled The Candlemas Procession: Lumen ad revelationem gentium, a light to enlighten the nations. It speaks eloquently of the symbolism of coming with candles to be blessed and being blessed ourselves as candles for God whose lives will give comfort to the suffering and light to the world.

Look kindly, Jesus, where we come,  
New Simeons, to kindle,  
Each at Your infant sacrifice his own life's candle.  
And when Your flame turns into many tongues,  
See how the One is multiplied, among us, hundreds!  
And goes among the humble, and consoles our sinful kindred.

It is for this we come,  
And, kneeling, each receive one flame:

Our lives, like candles, spell this simple symbol:  
Weep like our bodily life, sweet work of bees,  
Sweeten the world, with your slow sacrifice.

And this shall be our praise:  
That by our glad expense, our Father's will  
Burned and consumed us for a parable.  
Nor burn we now with brown and smoky flames, but bright  
Until our sacrifice is done,  
(By which not we, but You are known)  
And then, returning to our Father, one by one,  
Give back our lives like wise and waxen lights. Amen.

May God the Father, who separated the light from the darkness and saw that it was good, dispel darkness from your hearts and fill you with light.

May God the Son, who is the light of the world, shine through you into a darkened world.

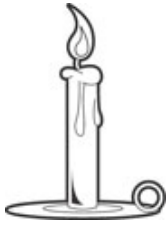
May God the Holy Spirit, who came in tongues of flame upon the faithful that the truth might be known to all, fill you with courage and wisdom to share the light of God within you.

And the Blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be upon you and among you and remain with you always. Amen.

5 Feb Taizé – Candlemas – from 2010, change 2<sup>nd</sup> song to The Lord is my light

6 Feb - Epiphany V – 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday – Mother Raggs Preaching

Lessons Isaiah 58:1-12; Psalm 112:1-9; I Corinthians 2:1-12; Matthew 5:13-20  
Themes free from sin; fast = service; salt of the earth; light of the world



Cover: candle or p 31

8am 488 Be thou my vision  
opening 7 Christ whose glory fills the skies  
gradual 577 God is love  
offertory 488 Be thou my vision  
communion Ubi caritas (Taizé) (English and Latin)  
closing 542 Christ is the world's true light

Set us free, O God, from the bondage of our sins and give us, we beseech thee, the liberty of that abundant life which thou hast manifested to us in thy Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen*

Set us free, O God, from the bondage of our sins, and give us the liberty of that abundant life which you have made known to us in your Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

#### **Isaiah 58:1-9a**

Thus says the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: Shout out, do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet! Announce to my people their rebellion, to the house of Jacob their sins. Yet day after day they seek me and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments, they delight to draw near to God. "Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?" Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers. Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high. Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.

#### **Psalm 112:1-9 *Beatus vir***

Hallelujah! Happy are they who fear the Lord \*  
and have great delight in his commandments!  
Their descendants will be mighty in the land; \*  
the generation of the upright will be blessed.  
Wealth and riches will be in their house, \*  
and their righteousness will last for ever.  
Light shines in the darkness for the upright; \*  
the righteous are merciful and full of compassion.  
It is good for them to be generous in lending \*  
and to manage their affairs with justice.  
For they will never be shaken; \*  
the righteous will be kept in everlasting remembrance.

They will not be afraid of any evil rumors; \*  
their heart is right;  
they put their trust in the Lord.  
Their heart is established and will not shrink, \*  
until they see their desire upon their enemies.  
They have given freely to the poor, \*  
and their righteousness stands fast for ever;  
they will hold up their head with honor.

### **1 Corinthians 2:1-12**

When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.

Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written,

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,  
nor the human heart conceived,

what God has prepared for those who love him” --

these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God.

### **Matthew 5:13-20**

Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. 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. 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.”

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”