

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

December 30, 2018

Be The Light

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Michael and Sharron Symonette are my parents. I love my parents dearly, great people. But my parents when I was growing up had this skill set that I think aggravated me more than I appreciated. And this skill set was them regularly challenging me and calling me out. As a matter of fact, I used to think the definition of parenting meant to irritate your children by consistently and regularly calling them out as much as possible. But now I'm a parent and I know that that is not true. But my dad would do this by challenging me how I think, he was very cerebral, my mom very practical so she would challenge me in the way that I executed things and I did things. And now looking back on it, I realized that my parents weren't so much as focused on what I did per se or what I was doing they were more concerned about who I was becoming but I was not really mature enough to understand that and fully appreciate that. I was a good kid and pretty compliant but you know; it was just a bit much me. So I was excited to move on to the land of the free and the untamed called college. I was super excited about going to college. And when I got there my freshman year, you know, I kind of, I want to experiment and do things that you would do in college. So I went to this party and I was behaving inappropriately, I don't necessarily remember what was going on, but I do remember a young lady came up to me and her name was Jamieece Carruthers and she noticed some of my activity and she said to me I thought you were a Christ follower. I was like aaah, whoo wait, who are you again? And then I'm thinking in my mind is this a secret agent sent by my parents to monitor what I'm doing. And by the way Jamieece, we've never talked about this, so, if you see this, I do appreciate that now years later, so thank you. But fast forward a little bit after college I met my beautiful wife Erica and we got married and now Erica consistently challenges me and calls me out. And I say that lovingly now with maturity and understanding and I appreciate the value that that adds to my life and realize that a good marriage will do that for you.

But this weekend actually, what I want to do is I want to share with you one of the things that Erica consistently calls me out on and it's regarding my speaking. She often says to me you are good enough without your notes and I oblige her and I say; "well, thank you baby. I appreciate that". And I continue to go on and do what I do. But this weekend, I'm actually taking her up on that challenge. I am going to preach this message without notes. Now, I'm glad that you're clapping because if this goes horribly wrong, I want you to email Erica at...no, I'm just kidding, just, just kidding.

But seriously as I thought about what I wanted to share on this last weekend of 2018 I thought about what was really going on with my parents and what Jamieece and Erica and many others in my life what they were trying to do. And what they were trying to do and what they have done was they weren't calling out my activity they were speaking to my identity and calling me to live it. And as we go through the Gospels and we see what Jesus did Jesus was regularly calling out his disciples. He was regularly trying to help them understand their identity because he understood that that was paramount and how they thought about themselves is how they would ultimately express themselves in the world, so, he had to help them get that part right. One of the

ways that Jesus taught was he used metaphors and the metaphors were a way for him to help us and help his disciples ascertain and understand the things that he wanted to teach them. So we're going to unpack one of those metaphors briefly this weekend. So if you go with me to Matthew chapter number 5 we'll start in verse number 14 and will end in verse 16. Normally, I would have you stand but I know we have kids with us in this service. And so I want to try to make sure that we can expedite this as quickly as possible because I know you want to get out with the kids and I don't have any notes.

Matthew 5 starting at verse 14. Jesus says...

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

God we come before you this weekend, this last weekend of 2018. We thank you for your grace and your mercy and allowing us to see it all the way to this point. Now God we ask that you would illuminate for us what it is that you would have for us to hear from you on this weekend and God help us to be able to apply it to our lives and show us who you would have us to be. Lead us in the way that you would have us to go these things we ask in your son Jesus' name. Amen.

Briefly, 10 minutes or less, I just want to unpack this little idea this weekend 'Be The Light, Be The Light. Matthew 5, the setting here is on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. The audience would be the disciples and then there are some people who are gathering around who want to hear what Jesus has to say as he's teaching his disciples. And he's having a discussion with them and in this discourse that is also known as The Sermon on the Mount, very famous passage of scripture. Jesus is talking about a bunch of different things in this passage and after the verses that I read through chapter 7 in Matthew, Jesus is talking a lot about do's and don'ts like he's unpacking commandments and laws and he's giving clarity to the disciples on how they should live. But I find it interesting that before these do's and don'ts which would be activity Jesus spends a little bit of time laying a foundation of who they should be or identity. And one of the metaphors that he gives in talking about identity is light.

Now, I want you to take notice that that Jesus before he talks about activity and the things that they are doing he puts emphasis on who they are to be. And I find that that is a challenge I think for the world that we live in today and I would even say the world that the disciples were living in as well because we tend to flip those things around; our activity usually is how people identify us and sometimes how we identify ourselves. We also would take associations, outcome and results and make it or associate our value with those things but Jesus has those things turned around. And listen, if you don't believe that that is true that we have flipped those things around just think about what happens when you meet people for the first time or you go to an event or you go to some place where you don't really know anyone. The first thing that we're talking about has to do with activity usually or occupation. What do you do? And so we engage in discourse and conversation around what we do, our job, our occupation and then we're sizing up who's who in the room based off of those things. And then we talk about outcomes, things that

we've done and things that we've accomplished and groups and people that we are associated with. And you would think and you would hope that this would be different amongst Christ followers, right? But it's actually the same thing. I'm afraid that we associate our relationship with Christ or how we follow him based on activity association and outcome as well. Think about it, we grade the seriousness of our association with being a Christ follower based on how many ministries we are associated with or missions trips we've gone on or ministries and all these things that we are involved in. Not that those things are bad, we should be doing those things but they're just not primary. Then we also have associations that we have deemed, I don't know more Christ-like worthy or not; I'm conservative or I'm liberal or I'm pro-life or pro-choice or I'm reformed, or I'm non-denominational and the list goes on and on and on. Or what about even outcomes how or results how big is your church or how many services do you have and staff and volunteers and all of these sorts of things that we have made primary? And I don't think Jesus cares about that at all, that's not the thing that he is giving value to.

There's actually two examples of this in the Old Testament that I love; when the prophet Samuel is going to pick the next king of Israel. He's so enamored with some of the sons that Jesse has and God interrupts him and says, "hmmm, excuse me. I am really not interested in outward appearance. I'm not interested in the external things. I am concerned about the heart." And then Solomon takes the Baton later on in Proverbs 23, and he says; "as a man thinks in his heart, so is he". And so it's just this emphasis of what's going on internally that it's not about these external things. And so Jesus says that our identity at least one metaphor he gives is light and he just simply unpacks it.

He says second half of verse number 14. He says...

¹⁴ "A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house."

When I break that down and I think about that practically, I think what Jesus is saying is we need to first be light in our homes and how we treat one another in our homes, our family and our friends and then our neighbors and loving our neighbors as ourselves and then those in our community, like we need to be light there, you don't hide your light there. You don't cover it because it prevents others from from feeling this light that Jesus wants us to reflect. And then imagine if I'm being light in my house and in my community and in my neighborhood and you're doing the same thing and you're doing the same thing eventually, there's a town or there's a city that is reflective of that light that will be seen and people will be drawn to it and they will ask questions about it and this is what Jesus desires. It's kind of like DC is known for government and policy and all of those sorts of things. Jesus is saying this is what we should be known for, this should be our identity and I'm afraid that we've got some of these things twisted. We've gotten associations and activities and outcomes and all of those sorts of things, we prioritize those things. But here's the thing, you can have that activity, you can check those boxes and still not be a proper reflection of who Jesus is. We know people, we know stories, we don't have time this weekend to unpack all of that. But you can have those things and still not be a proper reflection of what it means to be the light.

I'm reminded of a quote and it's associated with a guy by the name of Peter Drucker. Peter Drucker's known as the father of modern management for those of you who read business books or in business, you may have heard the name of Peter Drucker. And the quote says this "culture eats strategy for breakfast". Literally what that means is you can put a bunch of stuff on the wall, you can have a mission statement, you can have all of this other stuff, but actually who you are in the end will show, that's 's all that means. And then there's a guy by the name of John O'Brien who put a little tag on the end of that quote and he says; "yes culture eats strategy for breakfast, but culture gets his appetite from purpose". And so what that means is who we are as Christ followers should look like light. That's what it should look like. And our connection to him should be reflective of our appetite for him. So, the question for you this weekend is; how are you being the light and is the light your identity? I'm not talking about a list of things that you can check off. I'm talking about who you are and who you are becoming.

Let me see if I can drill down on this and let you guys go. Here's the implication, Jesus says in the same way, this is verse 16

¹⁶ "let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

Listen, the good deeds is not about you. Lady Gaga says, she talks about we live for the applause and I think part of that is true. But the applause is not about us. The applause is about glorifying our father in heaven. That's how people will know who he is. That's how people will know who Jesus is. That's how they will know, and that's who we are to be.

So, as we are no doubt going into 2019 and we are thinking about resolutions and we're thinking about things that we want to do and accomplish. Let me help you think about it a little bit differently or, let me let me help you think about it in terms of what Jesus is saying when he's talking about being the light. Listen; let's not try to be the light in terms of activity. Let's try to be the light in terms of identity. And those two things are not the same thing. And here's what I mean. No doubt, you can go and do a bunch of things, of course, but you can't be the light in terms of identity without abiding in Christ, you've gotta abide in him and you got to let him refine that identity every single day that our society and our world is showing you differently.

Last thing I'll say is I think that many of us are challenged with this aspect of identity because we got a lot of junk swinging on our identity, a lot of junk that's been attached to our identity, a lot of just stuff that we've been carrying on year after year after year. And here's the thing, we got to get rid of that stuff, so I want you to come back next weekend as we kick off this series called 'Detox' because I think we've got to change how we're thinking. That is paramount because we can change what we're doing, but if we don't change how we're thinking it's not going to matter. And then we've got some hurt some habits and some hang-ups that we got to kick and get up out of here so that we can have the right starting point. So, here's the thing, listen, it's not about our activity and the output in terms of how we're measuring. It's about the input and it's about the heart because that is how God is measuring.

Let's pray. God, we thank you so much for who you are. We thank you that you've given us this reminder on the last weekend of the year as we are going into 2019 and we're making

preparations and resolutions and plans and God help us to not prioritize activity but to prioritize identity. And to make sure that we're abiding in you and that we're spending time with you and that we're trying to understand what it means to be the light instead of just these activities that are associated with light because God we want our purpose and we want our passion and we want those things to be right because ultimately who we are truly will show. And we want those around us to not pat us on the back and not glorify us but to glorify you and to be drawn to you. Help us to do that when it's hard help us to do that when it's frustrating and it's not easy and compromise seems like the better way help us to stand firm and who you've called us to be. All these things we ask in your son Jesus' name. Amen.