

“Can I Get a Witness: In Our Community”

Acts 1:8

8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Matthew 5:14 – 16

14 “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, 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 who is in heaven.

One of, if not the first thing, you do when you walk into a dark room is reach for the light. You dare not walk into a room that is dark because you don’t know what is there, you can’t see the danger of the table that’s waiting for you to trip over it – you can’t see the child’s toy that is waiting for you to step on it, you can’t see the television waiting for you to knock it over. In order to make your path clearer, your reaction is to turn on the light.... Unless you are like me ...I usually get up in the middle of the night and I don’t want to wake anybody up so I don’t turn the light on. I figured I’ve been in this house a while I know where everything is I don’t need to turn on the light I know where all the dangers are, but what I miss is my boys leaving their shoes in the floor or my wife placing the vacuum cleaner in the hallway and thinking I have everything under control, I trip over the shoe or bump into the vacuum and stumble to the ground to the painful realization that no matter how comfortable I get with my situation, it is always better to turn on the light.

This is the predicament that we face today. We have gotten so comfortable with the world that we have neglected to turn our lights on for God. We think because we know the people, we know the culture, we know what they are going to say, we know what they are going to do and we, rather than turn our lights on so all can see a clear truth, we try to blend in and ultimately what will happen is we will trip over the same trouble the world is tripping over fall into the same hole the world is falling into when we could have illuminated our path with the word of God and the will of God and not only save ourselves from trouble, but possibly somebody else.

Today we begin a three-part series of the concept of Acts 1:8. This is the much known verse where Jesus gives the roll out plan for reaching the lost and making an impact in this world. He says, after you receive power. The power he is speaking of is the Holy spirit. He has spoken of his disciples receiving the Holy Spirit before.

In John 14:25 “These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. 26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

This is the promise. The promise that they would receive the power they needed to accomplish their assignment of reaching the world.

Now he says, the promise I told you about is going to come and when it comes, here is the plan, start in Jerusalem, that was the community they were in. Start close. Then move to Judea and Samaria. That is the region they were in. Start close and then move out further. Then run to the ends of the earth spreading the good news wherever you go.

We are located at 9500 Wornall rd. We have determined that our Jerusalem is our 2–5-mile radius, or a 15min or less drive to our church. These are the people that should be impacted by our being on this corner. This is the neighborhood. This is homebase. If we were to ask the people in our neighborhood about our church, what would they say? Would they say, that is the church that makes a difference, or would they say, we don't know, we see people drive in and drive out on Sundays, but they really don't interact with us during the week.

We have a vision of our SKC Campus, to see the life of our church resemble the life of those living in our 2 to 5 mile radius or have less than a 15min drive to our church.

What does our 2 – 5-mile radius look like. 62% are white 19% are black 8% are Hispanic 11% are other. What about the generations. 72% are born after 1965 or are under 58 years old and about 75% percent of those are born after 1981 or are around 42 years old. More direct, 53% of the people in our neighborhood are born after 1981. 53% of the people in our neighborhood are 42 years old or younger.

What does our congregation look like? About 94% of our regular Sunday morning attendance for this location is white and 7% are Black or other. Our average age at this location is 66.

We do not look like our neighborhood. We do not resemble the lives of those who live withing a 15min driving distance of our church. What does that tell us? We need to let our neighborhood know, they are welcome here. This means we throw preference out the window and let the Gospel speak for itself.

Over the next three weeks, we will be challenged by the word of God to reach our community, our city and the ends of the earth. I ask this question every time I preach, but today I really want to know, are you interested? Are you interested in hearing what Jesus did to reach the least of these? Are You interested to hear what Jesus did to reach those who may be different? Are you interested in hearing and seeing what Jesus said and modeled to let the world know, that the gospel of Jesus Christ is for all. Are you interested?

In our text we have Jesus' famous sermon on the mount. He has just chosen his disciples, and now he sits before them and teaches them all that it means to be a disciple of Christ. What it means to be a light to a hurting culture.

He begins by teaching them the beatitudes. Through the beatitudes he teaches them that adverse or lowly situations and circumstances do not dictate blessedness and that being blessed is not equivalent to happiness. Happiness is contingent on happening while blessedness is purely planted in the relationship of the believer and Christ himself. You can be in a state of blessing even when the circumstances around you seem not to be in your favor.

In verse 13 he begins to tell them about their function in the world. The first illustration he uses is that of salt. Wanting them to understand that they are to be seasoning to the world and if they were to ever stop having the seasoning, cleansing influence of salt they are worthless.

In verse 14 he changes his illustration from salt to light where we have our focus today as we find how understanding our role as light will help us to be used by God to bring him glory. There are three lessons I believe will help us in reaching our goal to be light in this community. Again, are you interested?

First, he tells us

1. Our intended purpose as light is to clear a pathway to God.

Matthew 5:14 “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.

You are the light of the world, and our light should be like a city built on a hill. The reason, the purpose for building a city on a hill is so that it can be seen.

If you want to be left alone, you don’t build on a hill. If want to be isolated, if you want to live a quiet and secluded life you don’t build on a hill. You build on a hill to be seen.

I’ve learned that from just about anywhere in KC you can see downtown. That helps me because, whenever I get lost, I keep it as my guide because it cannot be hid, it keeps me from getting too lost. Jesus says here, you need to be that for people in the world, you need to be that for the people in our community. You need to be so close to God that His light shines through you and provides guidance and direction for a lost world.

Our light should not be an embarrassment but an encourager – Matthew 5:15a “nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket.”

Homes in this day were lit by small oil lamps that could be carried, but most times were set on a stand so that its light would fill the room. Jesus says Why would you light a lamp and then hide the light- it’s a waste of oil, it defeats the purpose of going through the trouble of lighting the lamp.

On the contrary those who are lights must be prepared to be in places of clear visibility.

Colonial is a big easily seen church, our building has no problem being seen, but we have to be careful that we are not known for our big building and not our big hearts.

We can be viewed in this community as a Fortress, a Savior or a partner. A fortress tells our community we have a building, but we don’t have any real investment. We don’t want to be a church who has a building we use to gear up to fight the world. We want to gear up to fight the enemy of this world by being a blessing to those who are in it.

We can be viewed in this community as a savior. This is when we are in the community, for the community, but we feel, it’s are job to fix the community. It is not our job to fix the community but bring the light of Christ to the community and let Jesus fix anything that is broken.

Look first among people suffering the problem for a solution. Then rely on the “uncertified” practical knowledge of those living in the same geographic and cultural zip code as the people experiencing the problem, instead of ivory tower ideas from distant scholarly experts. Certification is not always synonymous with qualification.

He goes on to say:

We tend to think that if a person is inarticulate, they are unwise. Nothing could be further from the truth. Part of listening to their language is refusing to be blinded by intellectual imperialism, where our

education has convinced us that only people who are as lettered as we are know how to create change. – “Lessons from the least of These”- Robert Woodson, Sr.

We can be viewed as a partner in this community. A Partner says, I’m not here to fix you, I’m here to listen to you. I want to know your story, I want to hear your heart, I want to know your dreams for this community, I want to come along side you to help make those dreams come true. That’s when we ask the question, what is God already doing in this community.

We know that God is already partnering kids with readers through lead to read to help bring kids to the right reading levels, we know that God is building leaders through Elevate and actually has positioned them to have classroom space in the Center high school. We know that God is bringing single moms into our building to receive healing and support for their parenting journey. We know that God is providing opportunities for us to use this building to allow the community to gather and discuss important issues. We know that God is moving, we have to listen to God and the community to make sure we are not a fortress or a savior, but a partner.

There are some things that could hinder us from lighting a path to God. What are those hinderances?

Being darkness along with everyone else will be a hinderance to reaching this community. This is when we live just as confused as those who don’t know Jesus. We do this when we point our light in the wrong direction. This happens when you blend scripture together to make it say what we want and use it to influence others. When you do this you lead people down the wrong path. Our world is full of light pointers that are sidwinding people into places with the word that have no biblical background.

We have to be careful telling people that if you are a Christian you ought not to have problems. If you are a Christian you ought not to get sick. If you are a Christian you ought to have money with no financial issues. This is light pointing in the wrong direction. Before we give instruction to people on why we feel a certain way, let’s make sure we are saying what God says, not what we or tradition says. Not what ‘how we were raised’ says. And that means not finding a passage to prove a point, but putting our point against the expanse of scripture and seeing if it holds up. And if it doesn’t. Don’t put that burden on someone else. Jesus didn’t so we should not either.

It does not do any good for us to be a light with no functionality. A couple weeks ago, a night storm blew our lights out and I could not find the flashlight. When I finally found it, the batteries were dead. I had access to a light but no functionality – it did not work.

You call yourself light, and people come to you and can get to you, but if you have not kept your relationship lit with God and the truth of His word but have combined it with your ideas and preferences, they will come to you with issues and you will point them away instead of directing them to freedom and peace.

We are to be lights that clear the way so that people can see God not blurry the way so that people can only see us. Don’t be a flashlight with no batteries keep your light lit so that when you need to clear the way for someone to get to God you can fulfill your purpose.

1-Our intended purpose as light is to clear a path to God.

2. Our impact on people as light should change them for their good.

Matthew 5:15 Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.

It gives light to all who are in the house. Seeing your good for God actually brings light to those who see you.

There is a concept I have seen called, "Pay it forward" this is when you see someone doing good and it motivates you to do good to someone else. And when someone sees you do good, others are motivated to pay it forward. Someone does good to you and you are motivated to do good to someone else.

You should live an infectious life for God a life that not only encourages others to be different, but almost expects it. By being in contact with you, people should benefit from your relationship with God.

As Christians we have a responsibility of living as if we know we are being watched

One of my professors in seminary would end his prayer by saying "In Jesus name and for His reputation". When people see me, what do they see? Am I making a good reputation for Jesus. When people hear me, is Jesus' reputation glowing with grace or trampled by trash talk. When I walk in a room, is Jesus' reputation promoted and uplifted, or is it stifled and pushed aside. What are you doing to invest in Jesus's uplifting and glorifying reputation?

Fathers – your family should grow in their Christianity because you are in the house. Children are forming their view of God based on how you treat them and treat their mother.

When you are at Work, understand you are strategically placed there to bring light to a dark situation.

If you are a teacher, pray over your students, pray over your class. If in the corporate world, get to work early and pray over your office.

Then operate at work like you prayed over it. Don't pray over your office then walk around telling dirty jokes and creating a bad atmosphere with a bad attitude.

In your family and family gatherings, these are prime opportunities to shine a light on all in the house.

Volunteer to pray and in your prayer give the gospel – better yet live the gospel as you interact with other family members.

Don't get intimidated by the actions of others thinking that you will ruin the fun if you decide to choose to stay holy, that would be the equivalent of having a light and hiding it under a basket.

When you find yourself in a messed-up situation make the situation better by shining your light.

We have a responsibility to listen and then engage. We have to be careful not to see mess and then be tempted to not engage at all. You know the most criticism I hear from talking to unchurched people, is not that the church engages wrong, but that we don't engage at all. We see mess, we see trouble, we see heartache and we pray for them, without praying for God to show us how to walk with them. We have to be light by bearing the trauma that is present in our neighborhood, bearing the rejection that is in our neighborhood, bearing the disappointment that is in our neighborhood.

We shouldn't withdraw, on the contrary we should commit to be there for them and walk alongside our community as lights in a hurting culture.

That reminds me of the time it was raining cats and dogs and my oldest son said daddy God's creation is in a mess, you need to turn your lights on so we can see. What he was saying was you have the ability to brighten up this messed-up situation so take advantage of your ability and turn your light on.

When you are in a messy workplace – turn your light on. When you are in a messy family situation – turn your light on. When you are in a troublesome predicament – turn your light on. You have a light and those around you need to benefit from your ability to turn your light on.

You can turn your light on by showing up in our Center schools that we partner with. Coming in September we will have the opportunity to walk around our partner schools and pray for one hour. When we host Glow night in October, you can turn your light on by being a welcoming face as people walk into our building. You can turn your light on by showing up to the homeowner association meetings representing Colonial with a smile and the love of Christ. You can turn your light on by making it a point to meet someone new when you come to church here on Sunday mornings. Our community needs us to turn on our lights.

1-Our intended purpose as light is to clear a path to God. 2-Our impact on people as light should change them for their good.

3. Our innermost priority as light is to bring God glory

This requires you being ok with someone else getting the credit.

The verse says the City is "Set." Notice the city was set on the hill it did not set itself. It was built, it did not build itself. It was set in the position it was set in so that it could be seen. That was its intended purpose. It was built by the builder to draw attention. God intentionally places and gives us light so that we can be light, but we have to remember that He is the one who set us. He is the one who designed us for His purpose.

This is not a natural ability – our flesh wants us to puff up and brag on how good we are and how much work we have done.

We love taking all the credit when everything seems to be going right, but when there are problems then we want to point the finger and find someone to blame.

We get like Adam – God put Adam to sleep and took from him a rib and fashioned the woman and then God brought the woman before Adam and he said she is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh and I will call her woman because she came from the womb of a man she is of me she is here for me and she is made out of me, then they sin by eating the forbidden fruit and all of a sudden Adam is like it's that woman you gave me. God it's your fault if you had not given me that woman I would not be in this mess.

When God allows your light to shine by serving Him, it is your responsibility to reflect the glory to him.

As you do that you bring attention to the God who enabled you to accomplish whatever you were able to accomplish.

The thing about light is that the darker it is the better you can see it.

We are surrounded by darkness when 16, 915 households are below the poverty level in our Jerusalem.

We are surrounded by the darkness of murder as Kansas City is on pace to have the worst year of homicides in our history.

We are surrounded by a lost generation. 61% of the people in our neighborhood do not attend any religious service regularly.

It's like the Stars – Stars shine bright all of the time, but you only see them at night. It's not because they just started shining, it's because it got so dark their light got brighter.

God has placed us in the darkness of this neighborhood to shine His light. As we do His will in dark places we shine for Him, when we are obedient to His word, we shine for him, when we take the high road when everyone else is taking the low road, we shine for him.

When you serve God, it begs the question why do you do what you do?

Then, you can tell them because Jesus died for me and shine some light on them, because Jesus was persecuted for me and shine some light on them, because Jesus didn't give up on me and shine some light on them – That's why the song writer said This little light of mine I'm gonna let it shine – Everywhere I go – I'm gonna let it shine – hide it under a bushel no – I'm gonna let it shine. Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Can I get a witness in this community? And the church said, Amen!