

# *Celebrating* **125** *years*

*Here We Are Again*

Matthew 5:11-16 (13-16)

March 5, 2017

Sermon by Rev. Dr. Alan D Dorway

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Sing with me:

This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine. This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine. This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine, let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

For more than 125 years, the light of Jesus Christ has shined in Everett.

We know that before the City of Everett was incorporated, we know during the same month the first college basketball game was played, and we know even before the Nutcracker Ballet was premiered, five small home churches, five small communities of faith had been worshipping in Everett, even before the year 1892.

Each small faith community had similar goals: to share the love of Jesus to the growing population, about 1200, of this mill town on the Puget Sound.

Our congregation (and I know our Baptist brethren would contest this) was the first to incorporate with a called pastor and settled into worshipping in a small building on Maple Street.

Eventually, the church grew, moved locations, and then built this wonderful sanctuary where we worship. I'm not sure what their first mission statement was, but for today, let's imagine it was: let it shine.

As our church grew, we decided this sanctuary was needed. We are impressed not just with the beauty and reminder of the majesty of God here, but also with the fact that our stained glass windows were dedicated on the same day as the church. Our windows share the story of faith and are a visible witness to God's salvation plan. It took a lot of faith and work for a church out on the edge of the United States to add stained glass windows, let alone have them ready for the actual dedication of the church on September 11, 1910. Even as we know 9/11 being associated with a terrorist act in our country, we see the vision that our legacy stands for something greater than this world. Let it shine.

Many of you remember and were here as extended families when the Rev. Dr. Stocker was called and our church experienced tremendous growth. We have amazing pictures of the steeple being added to our bell tower. We are blessed by the growth of our physical structure as the Westminster wing and then Calvin building were added to accommodate membership and outreach to our community. Let it shine.

Twenty-five years ago, on our 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, there was renewed excitement as we celebrated in worship, studied together, and gave generously in mission. We blessed each other as we grew in our discipleship, we blessed our community through our many gifts, and we honored Christ in our worship. It is not too difficult a stretch to understand why our vision recognizes our desire to share the love of Jesus in worship, through our discipleship, and in our mission to the world. Let it shine.

Indeed, our 125 years as a congregation has been a journey of highs and lows, many people coming through these doors to be baptized, married, celebrated, and growing closer to God. Generations of faithful women, men, and children have shared their gifts of stewardship of time, talents, and treasures. All of this is part of our collective DNA without ever losing focus on being part of Christ's body sharing the love of God with all people. Let it shine.

Jesus moves right from the portion of the Sermon on the Mount we call the Beatitudes to two powerful images of salt and light. For us, salt is common on our dinner tables and we are spoiled with the amount of lights we can turn on with the flick of a switch. But Jesus' disciples' ears would have perked up when Jesus mentioned salt and light.

Salt is a preservative and allowed food to be transported and imported throughout the Roman Empire. The Dead Sea continues to recede due to the processing of the salt into many forms, more recently for beauty products.

Salt played a huge economic factor throughout the world where routes, taxes, and even wars were the result of it's discovery, production, and transportation. Even the Roman battle technique of salting the earth to prevent growth of new agricultural crops demonstrated the power of salt in the ancient world.

Jesus tells us we are the salt of the earth. We are not just valuable as God's children, but we also have a roll to play. We are to help preserve the world. This does not mean we are to be satisfied with the status quo. This does not mean we forget our reformed heritage as the people of God. It does mean that we are different. Our allegiance is to following Jesus first and foremost in our lives.

Being salt means we are not to bow down to the gods of this earth, but we are to find what is good, beautiful, and righteous and support those ideals. It means we are living the Sermon on the Mount so that those who are cast out or looked down upon by our world, instead of continuing in that oppressive mindset and practice, we see each other as new creations where there is no longer society-made distinctions. As salt, we put on the new community in the Spirit and together we are part of the Christ's earthly body where all are welcomed and have value. Let it shine.

Jesus uses a powerful metaphor that a city on a hill cannot go back to being hidden once the lights are on. You just don't get a candle lit and then blow it out. We know we are close to our destination from a long road trip when we can see the lights of a town in the distance. The same was true for Jesus and his followers; they knew they were close to a city or town by number of lights.

Jerusalem, which was a city on a hill, can be seen from miles away. We all know, once fires are stoked, candles are lit in a large area; as the song says, it only takes a spark, and the lights are on and God is working. Cities were not to be dark; they signify protection, legacy, and intention.

Jesus knew that once the Holy Spirit enters into a life, we shine for God. It makes no sense for us to hide the light of Christ under a basket, but to open our hearts to shine God's love throughout our community.

Yes, for us it is easy to turn on a light, but when our lives have been opened to the grace of Jesus, we cannot go back to the way we were before. Let it shine.

Today, the good news continues to be Jesus calling us to be salt and light to a hurting world. Our vision has not changed in 125 years: share the love of Jesus to our changing and challenging community.

We are embracing the pioneering spirit of our ancestors by partnering with groups who extend our ministry by using our space every day of the week.

We use our space creatively through outreach to women, feeding and caring for those in need, teaching music to children, and demystifying stigmas about mental illness and providing support for families.

We provide a nurturing space where those wrestling with addiction can find the road to recovery, a meeting space for the county and various other groups, while at the same time; we still have plenty of space for our own unique ministries.

We've seen our own ministry grow and change over the years. Yes, we had a ton of kids in Sunday school, but now we are growing intergenerational discipleship where voices of young and old teach and learn from each other.

We are willing to tackle current issues and not give cookie cutter responses, but wrestle with God's Word and seek God's direction in our action. We have small groups, movie nights, and community building times that feed our souls.

We have an amazing worship and music program. We are committed to growing in our faith formation. And this congregation has a heart for mission that does not stay within these walls, but goes out from these walls sharing grace and being the hands and feet of Jesus to our world.

I know that if we added up all of our donations, all of our time, all of our volunteering, all of our prayers, and all of our care for others and the environment, it would add into the millions of dollars given and countless hours of support for the work of the Holy Spirit. Let it shine.

But we are not done. We are not content with just being the beacon on our hill. We know we have a bright future, but we cannot wait for it to come to us. We want to give glory to our heavenly Father, so we will build upon our foundation and prepare our legacy for generations to come.

Our vision affirms that our building will be a sanctuary for all. We will welcome all who come into our doors. We will learn to listen to stories different than ours so that we will grow deeper in the knowledge of God's amazing work. We will continue to share our space with groups and people, as our building is a multi-dimensional blessing to our community.

We will invite others here with the goal to preserve what is good and be a light in the darkness of life. And that mission is just beginning.

I am sensing a new movement of the Spirit that is calling us to challenge our assumptions about our world and to walk in boldness to be a light with fellow believers that there is a new kingdom coming. Yes, I am getting impatient for God to work, but we too have a part to play in the kingdom now.

We've had a privileged life of faith here and that has given us steady legs to stand on, but now it is up to us to take the hard steps to be a people reconciled to each other. It will be hard to work towards true equity not just in our community, but here in this congregation.

We will need to be grace-filled ambassadors of listening and seeking forgiveness. We will need to have difficult conversations and admit when we have been wrong so that together we all will be liberated as one people under our one Lord and can experience the freedom of grace and the steadfast love Jesus has for us as a kingdom community.

I do not believe we can hold on to our normal ways of doing church; those ways are not working. That's okay; we do not have to hold ourselves up to a mythical standard of attendance.

Instead, we need to push beyond numbers and begin to ask ourselves to testify to the movement of the Holy Spirit in our midst and celebrate when the light of the world illuminates our darkness. Let it shine.

Seven years ago when I came here, I knew I was called to be here. I'm scared beyond belief every time it dawns on me that I'm the pastor here. I feel so inadequate, but together we are better than we when we are alone.

We are meant to be in community and in relationship with each other as we support, care, and encourage each other on our faith journeys.

Seven years ago, I never had experienced a community come alongside me to help me through some dark personal times. I believe we are just beginning to scratch the surface on the meaning of being a kingdom focused community that walks with, cares for, and loves each other regardless of status, as we worship, serve, and follow Jesus.

We am blessed to be a part of a church that serves over 140 meals a week, provides space for showers and laundry to those in need. We have had the courage to stand up and speak truth to power on the dishonest practice of potentially building a courthouse without taking into consideration the overall community.

You have allowed me and supported me to take part in a study of need in here and be an advocate for faith here in Everett.

I too have been changed by our practices. I would never have thought honoring Earth day could be a month long process, joyful, and educational every time. I would never have thought I would enjoy an Easter sunrise service as much as I do. I would never have thought that I would be pushed in my faith as much as hopefully God pushes yours.

We never know what God's next step is for our congregation.

Yet, we will faithfully live up to our legacy of witness to the love of Christ being shared to our community every day.

We will use our sanctuary as a blessing, we will invite others to know Jesus' grace, we will be an open place where all are welcome, we will gather for worship, grow in our faith, and go to share in the mission of the Spirit being salt and light to our world.

125 years and we're just getting started. What will the church say about us at 250? They will celebrate, as we do today, our legacy of being the salt and light of Christ. And we will sing:

This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine. This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine. This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine, let it shine, let it shine, let it shine. Amen.

## 125<sup>th</sup> Litany of Celebration

Lord, you have been our refuge  
**From one generation to another**

Eternal God, in whom we live and move and have our being, hear our prayer:

For the church universal and for this congregation of your people,  
**We give you thanks!**

Lord we give you thanks for the vision of those who planned for this congregation, and for the commitment and dedication of all who have served together,  
**We give you thanks!**

For those who have served so faithfully in leadership positions as pastors, elders, deacons, and staff members,  
**We give you thanks!**

For those who have willingly given of their efforts to teach, encourage, and serve,  
**To you Lord, we give thanks!**

For those who have been part of this fellowship over the years, and now serve you in the church triumphant,  
**To you Lord, we give thanks!**

For the ways in which we have been able to care for one another and support one another on the journey of life,  
**To you Lord, we give thanks!**

For baptisms we've celebrated, professions of faith we have heard, and answers to prayer that we have experienced,  
**We are thankful Lord!**

For a congregation that has always desired to worship you faithfully and vibrantly, hearing your Word, singing your praise, and seeking your strength,  
**We are thankful Lord!**

For generosity that has enabled us to reach far beyond this community with the word and witness of the Gospel,  
**We are thankful Lord!**

For the children, youth, and adults who have been here, grown in their faith, shared their lives and continued in witness as they serve you throughout our world,

**We give you thanks!**

For those who have been married here, for the lives we have celebrated, and for those who have come to this sanctuary to be in worship and grow in love,

**We give you thanks!**

For faithful stewards among us who have lived for others and who have served you by loving our neighbors,

**We give you thanks!**

For all the saints who have stood among us, whose memory still empowers our faith and strengthens our witness,

**We are grateful Lord!**

For the ministries of worship, mission, nurture, discipleship, and community; and for all who have been touched by your love shown by your people here,

**We are grateful Lord!**

We pray together:

**Receive our gratitude Lord, for 125 years through which you have led us, and open us to the future of your promise. In the years that are ahead, grant us encouragement in the work of changing ministry. Be with us as we vision for other generations. Challenge us to not be complacent, but to be witnesses of your grace. Give us trust in your Holy Spirit, that we may find joy and peace in our common life, strength and courage to live in the world for your reign, and hope in the gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit!

**Alleluia! Amen!**