

# LIGHT + LIFE

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## LIGHT AND LIFE • Matthew 5:14-16 • Tim McConnell • January 27, 2019

Today is a very different Sunday. Our pattern is to have a congregational meeting for members only sometime late in the day, and usually we speak only to our most-involved core folks. But today we want to open the playbook for everyone. I want to tell you what First Pres is about and what we think we are going to be about for the next few years. Your elders and staff have been praying, talking and watching and we believe Christ is calling us forward to a next chapter. We are called to be "Light and Life for the City." Here is the bottom line up front: We are a great place for Christians. We also need to be a great place to meet Christ.

Our church was started in 1872 by a guy named Sheldon Jackson who was told by the Presbyterian Missions Board that he was too weak to go to India as a missionary. So he came west. Within a seven-year period, Jackson established 67 churches in the Rocky Mountains and saw 36 church buildings erected. Ours was one. He went on to start about 110 churches from Arizona to Alaska. Reflecting on his time planting churches around here, he said he learned two lessons. He learned the need to develop a firmer trust in God. The second was the need to lead with boldness and courage. Here's from his journal: "God blesses aggressiveness. We need to cultivate an aggressive spirit. An asking of God for great things—an expectation of great things from God—and an attempting of great things for God." We wouldn't say "aggressive" probably, but how about "bold"? Jackson said he didn't get into ministry for his health or for an easy living, "but as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ to do the greatest good to the greatest number." That's what your elders and pastors have been praying for; that's what we have prepared to ask of you today. It's time to be bold, to ask God for great things, to expect great things and attempt great things in His name so we can be ambassadors of the Lord Jesus Christ, doing the greatest good to the greatest number.

Colorado Springs is changing, particularly downtown. There was a time when leadership here seriously entertained moving out to the suburbs. It took courage and faith to stay downtown. Well, now we are here for the renaissance of downtown. Every week Colorado Springs is named the number-one best this or that city. It's ridiculous! We are getting ready for what may well be the most effective and exciting chapter First Pres has ever seen right here, and it is going to take some initiative for us to match the wave. We are not at full strength. Looking back to 2008, ten years ago we had 4,700 members and worshipped around 2,600. Today we are around 3,200 members and 2,000 in weekly worship. There has been an uptick in the last few years, but to summarize a decade, over ten years we experienced a 34% decline in membership, a 22% decline in Sunday attendance and 5.5% decline in giving. It's time to change course. While we are headed in a better direction, we still have ground to make up to get to our 2008 numbers and what we should be aiming for is even greater growth than that—to do the greatest good to the greatest number. It's not optional, we need to focus on growth. Our average age is 63, which makes it harder to be attractive to 20-somethings. Luckily I've come up with an easy solution to that one. I've decided to ask everyone here today to have one baby. No? It's been working with the staff. I only mention the average age so we remember how hard it can be to be twenty or forty years away from that average and feel at home. We are committed to reaching the next generation for Christ. We have faced some challenges and are not in full strength, but I believe we are returning to strength and can be back at that level within five years. It's going

to take some change, it is going to take some initiative and sacrifice, but why not try? Back to strength, to do the greatest good to the greatest number—why wouldn't we expect great things, and attempt great things? Why wouldn't we pray and trust God to bring us back to strength right here in downtown?

So let's talk about the next 1,000, the next 1,000 people we intend to reach. We are a great place for Christians. Some of them will be believers when they arrive. They've moved here and found a home with First Pres. That's fantastic! But, the strength of the next 1,000, the majority, must be people who do not yet know Jesus. The only way for us to survive the current decline of the church—and we know we will, we know Christ will carry His church through—the only way is to take up the mantle of evangelism. The next 1,000 are men and women and children who today know nothing of the love and grace of Jesus Christ, and they are going to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ through the ministry of First Pres and what we do here every Sunday morning. And they won't all be 20-somethings. Many should; many will. But we have a large population of retirees who move to Colorado Springs who will finally know Christ in that chapter of life. Who are they? Families. Millennials. Some are our kids who need to be raised up to personal faith in Christ. Do you remember what it was like to be without Jesus? We can reach the next 1,000 if we are willing not only to be a great place for Christians, but a great place to meet Christ.

For some time, as a staff and among the leadership we have talked about the Path of Discipleship. Jesus declared in the Great Commission that we are to "...go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). If we about doing anything in the world, we are about making disciples. We are worshipers making disciples. So the **Path of Discipleship** looks like this: we help **Community Members** become **Participants**—people we know by name and have on some contact list or group. But **Participants** we help to become **Worshippers**—people who know God and know that God is worthy of praise, people with a relationship with God who give thanks for His grace and mercy in Jesus Christ. **Worshippers** we want to help become **Disciples**, but not just information-gathering, learning disciples, but doers of the Word. We call those **Activated Disciples**. At First Pres, we are good from about the middle of that graph forward. If you are a **Worshipper**, we are an excellent place for you to grow and activate your gifts. But Jesus said to "go" to all people, making disciples out of them. Make disciples out of people who are not disciples.

First Pres is a great place for Christians. Can we be a great place to meet Christ? We are a great place for Christians. We really are. And you know what? We will always be a great place for Christians. But we need to put more energy on the first half. Can we be a great place to meet Christ? Our logo and mission statement are a first strategic push back toward the front end of the Path of Discipleship. This logo isn't designed to gather Christians, it's designed to start conversations with non-Christians. One college student had it on his laptop this fall. A fellow student asked him, "What's that?" "That's my church. I go to First Pres." If it was a traditional church logo that question never would have been asked. Do you know what the guy said next? He said, "I don't know about God. Why does He let bad things happen to good people?" Know what the student said? "Yeah, I think about ques

tions like that too. Want to get a group together and maybe open the Bible and talk about what we find?" And do you know what the other guy said? He said yes. And a few others joined in. It felt a little strange for us at first to take on a logo like this. We're not used to actually making decisions to actually impact the lives of actual non-believers, community members. But that's what Christ called us to do, and we are about to do it more and more. We will lead with boldness to be ambassadors of the Lord Jesus Christ to do the greatest good to the greatest number, just like Sheldon Jackson taught us.

Our Matthew passage lays it out for us. A community of Christ followers becomes a witness to Christ. A gathering of believers becomes a city on a hill. It becomes a light. There is nothing to match the power of the local church when it is faithful to Jesus Christ. It is a beacon, a light in the darkness. "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 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. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:14-16). Because you are a great place for Christians, you are a light. Because you worship deeply, because your teaching is true, because you marinate in the Word of God, because you grow in faithful discipleship, you are a light. Now let that light shine. Don't just be a great place for Christians, be a great place for others to meet Christ.

Along with the logo came a mission statement. We are called by Christ to be "Light and Life for the City." Well, that isn't much about us and what we're getting out of this organization is it? It asks a lot more about what others see when they look at us. What is our city getting? Are they getting something of Jesus through us? It's not Light and Life *in* the City; it's not Light and Life to the City: it's Light and Life *for* the City. Do those around us genuinely believe we are *for* them? Do they believe God is for them and has good purposes for them? What are they hearing about that from us? Jesus is the light of the world. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. "In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind" (John 1:4). Light is associated with knowledge. There is knowledge to share, insight to gain. When we are in the dark, we are blind; but when we are in the light, we see. Light is purifying truth. Life is a little different. When we think of life, we think of activity. Jesus brings a new way of life, a new way of living in this world. His ways are actually life-bringing instead of life-eroding. Following the mission of Jesus means being those who convey His light and His life to the world. We are a life-giving body, responding to the needs and hurting places of the world with compassion and love. We also believe in generating beautiful, creative songs and paintings and writings and other arts. Life literally spreads from here around the world. "City" is a way of talking about how we live together. Yes, we are committed to Colorado Springs because this is where God planted us and established this mission. But our true allegiance belongs to another promised City; the future City; the City where we live in peace and harmony and fullness of life with God Himself as our home. We are called to be "Light and Life for the City." That means we won't just be a great place for Christians; we'll also be a great place to meet Christ.

What does a great place to meet Christ look like? Some things will stay very much the same. We know for sure we are staying right here, in the heart of downtown. This will be where we return to strength, and any expansion will satellite from here. We know

we are called to worship in two modes. The Worship Center is not an experiment; the Sanctuary does not have an expiration date. I am committed to worshiping well in these two modes for as long as the Lord allows, and I fully expect to hand off a two-mode worshiping church to my successor one day (long from today). We are staying unapologetically evangelical and Reformed—both words that stand some definition, but Christ-centered, Gospel-focused, Biblically-based, using the very best expression of Reformed and Presbyterian church order we can find in our times. A lot doesn't change. We are a great place for Christians. But what does a great place to meet Christ look like? I say it changes the way we **think**, it changes the way we **talk**, it changes the way we **plan**, and it changes the way we **pray**.

It is going to change the way we **think**. Do you think of First Pres as an instrument to reach the lost for Christ? Do you think of your church as a tool for evangelism? We are changing our environment to be more conducive to the unchurched, first-time seeker. We are adopting shifts in our hosting strategies, welcome strategies, Doorways classes and all our communications patterns. Do you know why? So that you can use First Pres as a tool to help others meet Christ for the first time. Change the way you think about Sunday morning. Change the way you think about First Pres. We are making every effort to be a useful instrument for reaching the lost for Christ. I need to know you think of your church that way.

It changes the way we **talk**. Sometimes you will hear me or other leaders explaining things in simple terms. Things you already know, but newcomers may not. It's fun for me to talk about the eschatological implications of disciplined tithing in the stewardship of the body of Christ. It's fun for us to say we meet with the deacons and the trustees in the narthex after the benediction. But, do you know what, if you rolled in here with no church background on a Sunday morning with the desperate hope that maybe God has something for you, that stuff would be gobbledy-gook. So it's out. Talk with the expectation that your hearer has no idea what 'inside baseball' church is about. It takes some intentionality.

It changes the way we **plan**. We work hard to put together teaching series and make the point clear with our prayers, songs, communications and even the decorations on the walls. Remember the "First things First" series? "Lord"? "Gentle"? These are going to keep coming folks. Let me explain to you what they are for, because they are not for you. Well, they're a little for you. They help us all stay focused and grow together, but the other thing they are for is your own plans to use First Pres as an evangelistic tool. When you see a series coming, listen, I don't want you asking "I wonder how much I'll get out of that." I want you asking, "I wonder who I know who needs to hear that." Don't worry, the Word of God will come in strength and power, it will nurture your soul and give you all you need to carry on, but I want you planning to invite. I want you looking for your "plus-one." We have to change the way we plan for church. I'm going to hazard a guess that almost everyone in this room, if you've been with us a year, had a Sunday last year when you walked to your car or on your drive home you thought, "Crud! I really should have invited so-and-so to hear that." True? Here's the promise we are ready to make today, Vision Sunday 2019: The next time you see a message coming and you wonder if it will be good for your searching, unbelieving friend or family member, my promise to you is that message will be every bit as clear and that Sunday morning experience of worship will be every bit as powerful as that Sunday

you regretted not issuing the invitation. You have heard how I sometimes call for a prayer of salvation at the end of a message. This year that won't be random. It won't be every Sunday, although the Gospel is always there, but on set Sundays we as a staff and among the Prayer Team and other leaders will know that a call for salvation is coming. Change the way we **plan**.

Change the way we **pray**. Salvation belongs to the Lord. This is God's plan of salvation, God's mission to seek and to save. This is Christ's work to reach the lost and the Holy Spirit's power to bring redemption. I can get up here and spout pretty theories all day long, but "Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain" (Psalm 127:1). Pray for people who need Jesus. Pray for an opening to share His light. Pray for your church to be an effective instrument of conversion in the hands of the Lord. Pray for First Pres to be a great place to meet Christ; to be Light and Life for the City.

2019 begins the next chapter. A lot is already on the way. It includes expansion and renewal of all our Family Ministry. It includes the First Pres Fellows coming in August. (This weekend we got our official first acceptance—Number one is in! As of yesterday). Let me tell you, we are about to see a dozen young leaders roll up on our church in August you will not believe! Our staff and trustees have been working overtime to bring a full renewal of our network and internet systems so we can use a new church management software called ROCK. I know, sounds thrilling. But you just wait. This is going to change the way we interact with our church and one another—and listen, if you're twenty and your church doesn't exist on your phone, your church doesn't exist! The next chapter begins today. The next chapter of our church is a critical one. We can be complacent, stick with status quo, and continue the slow decline into diminution and destruction, we can just melt away... As John Ortberg said to our national gathering a few years ago, we can be content to just "die a little slower," or we can take on the mission of Christ to seek and save souls from eternal death, to shake the gates of hell and rob damnation of its rewards. I'm not content to die slow. We are a great place to be a Christian; we can be a great place to meet Christ. First Pres can be Light and Life for the City.

In your hand is a goofy little flashlight. Don't say we never gave you anything. It's just a fun thing, but today it is a symbol. It is something in your hand. Because, in many ways the whole purpose of this morning is to tell you: the next step is in your hands. We are doing all we can to make First Pres a great place to meet Christ, but the next chapter is really up to you. Will you begin to think, plan, talk and pray differently? Will you begin to use First Pres as an instrument of evangelism to reach this city for Christ? Will you trust us with your friends and family members who need the Lord? This is going to be a great place to meet Jesus for the very first time. We're going to put down the lights in a minute and allow a shroud of darkness to come over us. As the music begins, we are all going to just sit and take a moment. Then, after we start things up here, when you are ready, if you are willing to be a part of this mission, if there is anything in you ready to say yes and commit to being the city on the hill, the light on the stand, to being Light and Life for the City, an instrument in the hands of Christ who came to seek and save the lost, if there is anything in you ready to say yes—stand and lift your flashlight.

## STUDY GUIDE LIGHT AND LIFE THE LIGHT AND LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST Matthew 5:14-16

### **UP:** Connect With God Through Spending Time in His Word

Read Matthew 5:14-16.

1. Israel had been called to be light for "all nations" and "for the Gentiles" in the past (Is 42:6, 49:6). When did Israel do this well? When did they fail to do this?
2. Where do you see darkness in the world? When you read the news, what grabs your heart?
3. As you watch the news, talk with friends and family around the country, and participate in social media, where do you see darkness in our nation?
4. Where is there darkness in our city? When you look around our city, interact with your neighbors, look out your office window, etc., where do you see a need for the light of Christ?
5. How can you, in following Jesus, bring light to these places?<sup>1</sup>

### **OUT:** Connect With the World Around Us (Join God in His Mission)

When you think of First Pres's role in Colorado Springs, what opportunities do you see for our church in the next ten years? What will need to change for us to most effectively shine light in a shifting world? How will you participate in this?

### **IN:** Connect with Each Other

Close by praying for our church. Pray that our leaders would be equipped to discern God's will for our congregation. Pray that we would be nimble and ready to meet the needs of a changing world. Pray that we would be effective in being light and life for the city.

<sup>1</sup> N.T. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone Part 1 Chapters 1-15*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 42.