



Richmond Hill Reflections

“The Source of Light” (Preached by D.J. McCready)

February 2, 2020; Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

Readings: Matthew 5:13-20; “The lights” by Miranda Nash

In his sermon on January 12, Pastor James talked about his need to ground himself and get time to study and contemplate. He used a quote from Richard Rohr, a priest who has authored many books emphasizing the need to ground oneself - “Without action, our spirituality becomes lifeless and bears no authentic fruit. [But] without contemplation, all our doing comes from ego, even if it looks selfless, and it can cause more harm than good.” In this reading, there is a source (contemplation) for spirituality. My intention this morning is to first examine the light we shine as individuals and as a corporate body and then what is the source of our light.

We probably remember learning as children the song “This little light of mine” but most of us know the first verse which serves as the chorus. This reminds me of a story I read once about a man who was near death and had three sons and wanted to choose one of them to take over his vast business empire. He gave each of them \$1 and told them to use the dollar to buy something that would fill his hospital room. The oldest son came back with two bales of hay and spread it on the floor. The second son had bought sacks of feathers but they also lay on the floor and did not fill the room. The third son told his Dad that he had given some money to a charity and with what was left bought a book of matches. He pulled the blind on the window and struck a match and the room was filled with light. The son with the match got to take over the businesses.

We light candles at the start of the service of worship to remind us that we occupy territory once cared for by the Mississaugas of the Credit, to remind us to love and be inclusive. At a recent gathering of churches, each person lit a candle and placed it around a large candle that was called the God candle. Those who attend Meditation always have candles as they centre themselves. We shine our light before others. When I was still teaching at Wilfrid Laurier University, I once had a student follow me from class to my office. Once I got my office door unlocked he said “Are you a Christian?” I had not said anything directly in the economics class that called upon moral authority or would indicate I was a Christian and so I was struck and the first words out of my mouth were “Yes, but what made you think that?” The student said it was just the way I talked. It goes to show that each of us carries a responsibility to continually shine our light.

But we also have a corporate or group responsibility to shine our light at Richmond Hill United Church. Coming back to the scripture, this follows immediately after the beatitudes and is considered to be a part of the beatitudes. The scripture is clearly meant to tell us to shine our light and not hide it. In other scripture, Christ calls Himself the Light of the world but here in this scripture there is a strong implication that we also are light endowed with the same light as Christ. That suggests we have a responsibility to be like Christ – loving, humble, accepting of all, and being what the beatitudes asks us to be. Remember in the 1990s the phrase “What would Jesus do?” became popular. I still have the cap. As a consequence we need to shine our light to the world right here at Yonge and

Centre. Having an historic building with a spire and Church bells is a start but it does not speak to people in the same way that people contact can.

We committed in our intentions in April 2018 to become a Centre for Community. We do that a great deal around Richmond Hill United Church and those who heard me preach last summer will remember that I listed a number of ways that we shine our light and our pastor reminded us last week of the Breakfast Club, the Krasman Centre and other ways that this corporate body shines its light. We also have Hearts and Hands for Africa; we have helped 360 Kids and L'Arche to help people in our community. We have partnered with CAYR (formally the AIDS Committee of York Region) which has expanded to encompass programs in harm reduction and safe spaces for youth and seniors. Indeed, this afternoon at 3:00 we are co-sponsoring "Love is Love" for Senior 2SLGBTQ+ people and allies at the McConaughy Centre. Our Vision Keepers also initiated a request to sponsor a Rainbow Railroad Refugee and the United Church head office partnered us with a group of workers in law offices in downtown Toronto. Thursday, our Rainbow Refugee is arriving on a flight from Frankfurt. He had fled Syria to Turkey. I ask for prayers that all goes smoothly but this is just another example as to how we can shine our light – acceptance, love, and giving hope. We have renters on the premises every day of the week and how we treat them will show how much light we are giving off. We were recently chosen as one of 7 Churches to examine how we can expand our role in our community through innovative ministry. After our first session, I came away feeling we are ahead of several of the other Churches attending but we can do so much more as we seek to shine our corporate light.

Light comes from a source – whether it be daylight or a match or a lamp or a light bulb. I remember when my parents had a cottage just outside Ottawa where the airport is today – it had no electricity so we had kerosene lamps hanging on hooks in the evenings. One has to have a wire connected with the power grid or a generator to have electric lights. In 2013, we experienced a period with no electricity here in Richmond Hill and many of us found other sources for light – flashlights or candles. The problem was not the source – it continued to operate, the problem was that the ice had downed many of the wires. In some parts of Asia and Africa where I have been electricity sources are insecure and people remain prepared to do without by having other sources for their light.

In our reading of the poem about the lighthouse, we see how both the source of light and the transmission can change but still the light shines. What is the source of our light? You may immediately say it is Jesus or God and that would be truthful but I want to explore that a bit further. Hydroelectricity comes from water sources such as the water flowing through the Sir Adam Beck power plant in Niagara, My grandfather was chief engineer at that plant and as a child of about 5 or 6, just after he retired he took my father and I down to see the turbines working. Remember I was still small and those turbines seemed huge but in the late 1940s, that was the most efficient and eco-friendly way to produce electricity. The electricity has to be transported and that requires a much more involved network of wires and transformers. If it comes from nuclear or wind power again it needs that intricate set of wires and transformers.

A candle needs a wick and a match or another candle to be lit. A lamp requires kerosene and a wick. Even a match requires a source and that source is the extreme reactivity of phosphorus with the potassium chlorate in the match head. When the match is struck the phosphorus and potassium chlorate mix in a small amount forming something akin to an explosion.

If the origin of light, like the turbine engine is Christ, we still need a mechanism to get our light burning brightly. You and I are fed by our attendance at Sunday morning worship service or we are fed when the lay visitors appear to bring prayer and cheer to those who cannot make it to Church. Part of our lay ministry is the Hospital Service the third Sunday of every month. While Ann Whittingham and Donna Byers make sure someone is there to run the service, play the piano, etc. it requires volunteers to get people in wheel chairs into the service. For myself, I would not be able to do the service if I did not join in worship here. Some come to Wednesday Meditation, others go to Forest Church and others seek study groups such as H.A.I.R. or Shalom Seekers. In some Churches that I have attended over the years they have adult Sunday School and there are Bible Studies separate from a Church such as Kay Arthur's Precept Ministry. This is what brings the power generated by our Creator so that we can shine.

Over the years I have had short periods where I had not found a local Church and I admit that my prayer and study life lost strength during those periods. We need the reminder of worship and contemplation on the music and the message to increase the wattage in our light. We also need the love and relationships of a Church body to increase the wattage. Just as when an electrical wire becomes disconnected, when we are disconnected from our source we do not shine like we do when we are connected. For the Quakers or Friends it is silence while seeking a message from the Holy Spirit. In some denominations I have been part of, members of the Congregation share their spiritual journey that can inspire others to connect to God. In some Churches such as Old Order Mennonite, focus is on scripture and music is not a part of their connection. We have a more traditional Methodist type service in which music, prayer, scripture, and a message connect us to God.

If we are going to be seen in the Community around us as LIGHT, we need people who are inspired by our worship to open up our hearts to those around us. Let me cite an example. Connecting the Community is a regular Tuesday morning group talking about and encouraging activities and businesses in our community. They have met for years at the centre for Performing Arts but in 2019 started to meet here at Richmond Hill United Church. Donna Smith, Bev Blake have taken it upon themselves to provide coffee and to shine our corporate light. That resulted in our December candlelight service drawing a number of Connecting the Community people into our Sanctuary. We need to find even more ways to share our light. The more we show our light, the more the community will want to find the source and the more they will hook up with it at RHUC in worship, in meditation, or in Forest Church. So while Jesus is the original source, there has to be a distribution and WORSHIP in whatever form is what ensures we are the light to others. Amen.