

**“That They May See Your Good Works”**  
a message by Dr. Bruce Havens  
**BASED ON THE THEME, “YOU CAN SEE IT WORKING”**  
**Arlington Congregational Church, U.C.C.**  
**November 8, 2009**

**Matthew 5:13-16 [ NRSV ]**

<sup>13</sup>“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. <sup>14</sup>“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. <sup>15</sup>No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup>In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

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**D**o you light up with joy and glee when you pay your bills? Do you jump up and down and shout about the opportunity to support JEA, Comcast, and Shell Oil? No? You don’t run out to tell your neighbors about the great work Mayor Peyton and the City Council are doing with your tax dollars? Humph... as they say these days, “what’s up with that?”

Well, okay, how about this? Do you get all excited about Sunday mornings? Do you jump out of bed and say, “Whoopee, I get to go worship the Lord today!” Or do you call up your friends and relatives about 7:00 a.m. on the Sabbath and ask them to join you for a rousing 10:30 a.m. worship service? What about when that offering basket goes by. Do you light up when you put your offering in there? Is that your favorite part of the worship service? I can’t imagine why not.

I was reading a sermon this week [yes, I actually go out of my way to read

sermons during the week, and not just to steal – er, borrow – material]. But even I was shocked when a Rev. Scott Weimer shared a story about a Kenyan woman who had joined his congregation.

“Her name was Lydia. She told me that she loved our congregation, but she really missed certain aspects of her home church, especially parts of the worship service. I asked her what she missed the most, and she told me something I’ve never forgotten. She said, ‘I miss the offering. In Kenya, we would sometimes dance down the aisles during the offering. We didn’t have much to give, but what we did have we gave with much joy. What a privilege to give back to God!’ she said.”<sup>1</sup>

Now, I don’t know what they drink for communion in his church, but I like this woman! How about you? Do you wish you could dance down the aisle

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<sup>1</sup> “What God Values in Stewardship, Day1.org, Nov 8, 2009.

during the offerings? I tell you I think she had found something that turned on her light switch for life. Well, I have to tell you a couple of stories of people who I think have their lights on when it comes to church. I think you can see it at work in them. I don't mean to embarrass them but I think it says something about letting your light shine.

About a week ago I was talking with Herman Stolk. Herman said that the thing he got the most satisfaction out of anything he did – and I don't recall if he said it was anything in church or anything in life – but he said, being involved in Family Promise was one of the most meaningful things he had ever done. I think his light was shining. I think there are a lot of you who have gotten involved with Family Promise who could say that.

I didn't ask him but I bet Jim Brandel could say the same thing about going to serve dinners at City Rescue Mission. If not that I bet he would say it about singing in the choir, and I know there are a lot of our choir members who would say amen, if we were that sort of a church. I can see their light come on when they stand up to lead our worship with music. I could name a dozen of you who I see your light come on when you are doing things that give glory to your Lord. I want you to notice that I did not say anything about their pledge or about their giving in the offering basket. But I will bet that their light would shine there if we were to look.

Jesus talks about salt and light in the verses we read this morning. Most of us get what he is saying, there isn't much mystery. He is inviting us to discover

what all the business and success writers are talking about – passion. Jesus is talking about feeling passionate about what you do and who you are as a disciple, as a follower of Jesus Christ. He says, let your light so shine that people see your good works and give glory to God. I would put it this way: can people see that your faith is at work in your life and that your life is at work in your faith? There are a lot of you that I can see it working in your life.

Now we are not the street – corner - evangelizing, testifying, amen - corner sort of church but Jesus didn't say that southern fundamentalist religion is the only way to follow him. He did say that there is something distinctive about those who have been touched by the grace of God and know it. He didn't say that they had to have 5 spiritual truths, a foursquare gospel, a Trinitarian theology and a partridge in a pear tree. He said let people see it at work in you and through you and that's one of the things that makes me proud to serve as pastor of this church. Show me another church where better than 15% of the giving goes to outside missions and ministries. I would say our light is shining as a church and I would put that up against any “mega-church” - lighthouse or not.

So I am not worried that there is a recession. I am not concerned that we may have a \$17,000 difference between our Mission Spending Plan and our income for this year. I want you to know one thing. I promised you that I would give you a gift each week of our stewardship growth emphasis series this year. Last week I suggested to you that

when you focused your faith on praise, proclamation, and trust you would discover a 3-dimensional God. That is, you would recognize the power that God has to act instead of limiting God to being a small, narrow little God. I suggested to you that praise, proclamation, and trust lead us to give to others in ways that free us. I talked about how Cami Walker discovered that by giving 29 gifts in 29 days she received back the gift of healing, hope, and really life itself.

This week my gift to you is what I will call the “light switch.” To get this light switch you need to know one thing. I want you to know that God does not need you to give for this church or any church to survive. Now, before Dave Wenzel or Nancy Ricker or the paid staff has a heart attack let me explain what I mean. Our faith affirms that it is all God’s anyway. We affirm that God gives it to us as stewards, as managers, to use it wisely. If none of us choose to turn the switch on our lights then God will find others who will. God has the power to do whatever God needs to do. God can find other people and God can find other churches if our church does not choose to do what God needs. What God wants us to know and what I want you to know is that you and I have a need to give.

The gift I want to give you is for you to be aware of your need to give. Giving is how you turn on the light switch. The Bible says we are made in the image of God. One of the things that means is that we are made to be givers as God is a giver. When we recognize that we are made that way, that we have that need, the light switch will go on, we will

let our light shine, and people will give glory to God. By choosing to let our light shine we often will discover the passion that brings light to our lives the way that Family Promise, City Rescue Mission, the choir, or a hundred other things that some of you do around here has brought light to your lives. My gift to you this morning is to help you better see how to flip the switch in your life the way that some of these other people I have talked about have.

I have to tell you that while I don’t get my switch flipped by writing those checks to JEA, AT&T or Wells Fargo, I do feel a light come on when I write my tithe check. Oh, yeah, easy for you to say you might think - after all you are the pastor. But before you think I am too biased to comment think about this: I help to pay my own salary. Now certainly if you work for Exxon you would be smart to use Exxon gas instead of Shell, but my point is that my pleasure in writing that tithe check isn’t based solely on selfish motives, if it is at all. For me it is an expression of what I am passionate about, it is about what gives light to my life. To be part of a church that does so much for so many people is exciting to me. I am excited about coming to church on Sunday morning and I am tempted to call some of you at 7:00 a.m. just to be sure you are coming, but I promise I will resist temptation.

Some people have asked me why I tithe and others have asked what tithing is. Some say talking about tithing sounds like asking too much or that it sounds too “Baptist.” So although the Old Testament, Paul and Jesus all recommend

that we tithed, I am not going to use that word. I am going to use an alternative that Paul used to guide the people of the churches he started. He talked about “proportional giving,” or giving in proportion to your income. I want to tell you that instead of resenting this or thinking this is asking too much that it is in fact the fairest and most just way for us to experience the blessing of giving.

When churches try to avoid talking about the “T” word they do things like ask everyone to give \$10 more. Or they ask people to increase their giving by a certain percentage of what they already give, but that is always harder on the person with less income than the person with more income. Giving in proportion to your income means everyone can give equally regardless of the fact that our incomes aren’t equal. That means that if everyone gave an equal percent then no one could brag about their giving, no one would need to feel inadequate for their giving and no one can use their giving as a reason to try to control the church. God gave us – here I am going to use the “T” word – tithing because it is the fairest way for everyone to experience the light bearing joy of giving.

So Tammy and I give ten percent of our income. Some people here do as well. If everyone in our congregation did give ten percent, this church would have more money for missions than we would know what to do with. I know that for many ten percent sounds impossible. I will tell you what I heard recommended years ago that I thought was a sound plan for someone wanting to experience the blessing of proportional giving at the 10

percent level. He suggested that a person figure out the percent of their income that they are currently giving and increase by 2% a year until they reach 10 percent. Studies show that the average of all giving in the U.S. to all charities is less than 2% of our national income. That means most of us would take five years to become tith- uh, proportional givers at a ten percent level. If we really want this church’s light to shine – if we want our light as Christians to shine then I believe this is the way we can do it. I realize that many are facing hard economic times. I realize some don’t have any income. I understand 10% of 0 is 0. Please remember that if you hear what I am saying at all do not hear what I am saying as having one iota of guilt in it for anyone. I look at it as a gift to you who are able to receive it. So I want to challenge everyone here who is not at that level to pray and consider committing to becoming proportional givers at a 10 percent level. I have practiced it for over 25 years and I would never go back. I am not bragging about myself, I am telling you that because I do that it has flipped the switch that allowed me to let God’s light shine and bring glory to God.

I believe that God will provide givers who will let their light shine so that God will be glorified. I hope you will join me in giving 10% or in a commitment to grow in that direction. I hope you will flip the switch and let your light shine that all who see it may give glory to God. AMEN.