

LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE BEFORE OTHERS

4th Sunday after Pentecost, Year B. June 28, 2009. "Homecoming Sunday." (Text: Matt. 5:13-16)

I've been thinking about this day and looking forward to it for a long time. —A *long* time! And so have a great many of you: our "Homecoming Day." Now it's here. *Hallelujah!* I hope you're as happy as I am.

Before I say anything else, I want to thank Steve DeClute, the superintendent for our project, and his boss, Bill Baker, and all the great people working with them who came early and stayed late, who worked often on Saturdays (and sometimes Sunday afternoon), who were unfailingly polite to the always-nosey rector and many curious church members who came wandering through the work site, and who did everything humanly possible to get us into this sacred space today. —I think some serious applause for this hard-working team of builders is fitting and proper, don't you?

It will be another week or more before everything is in place and the Baker Construction crew moves on to other projects, but it's wonderful to be here today and see how far we've come since that Sunday morning in February of 2007 when we gathered on this spot and voted to build.

As we sit in this magnificent remodeled church, our field of view is dominated by this dazzling, new altar window. Its focus is the cross of Christ, surrounded by rainbow rays of glory. The cross itself is big and bold and clear – open to the light of the sun and the blue of the sky. The beams of glory radiating from it pull our eyes back to the center, back to the cross —and draw our minds and hearts back to the Savior whose chief symbol it is. Our new window doesn't really have a name, but I think of it as "The Light of the World."

Jesus said, "*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*" Our church here in Aspen is dedicated to Christ. We are "Christ Church." He has called us to follow him and do His work in the world, and so I can't think of a better image for us to identify with than His shining cross. Jesus is the light of the world, the light that's always driving away this world's darkness.

Jesus said, "*I am the light of the world.*" But it's interesting that when He gathered His disciples on the mountainside to teach them His precepts for living – the "constitution and bylaws of the Kingdom of God" which we know as the Sermon on the Mount – He told them that *they* were "the light of the world." Christ is indeed the light, but *so are we*. We are His "light" in exactly the same way that we're also His "body" in the world: His hands to serve others, His feet to go everywhere, His ears to listen to the hurts and needs of those around us, His smile to cheer, and His eyes to see people everywhere as our sisters and our brothers.

When the detail work on the building is finished, metal letters mounted on the wall beside the door leading out from the church into the world will spell out the words of Matthew 5:16, "*Let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.*" We've adopted the first four words of that verse as our new parish mission statement: LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE.

Does anybody remember reading Robert Fulghum's book, *All I Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*? I see a few hands up. Well, in a later book he described attending a seminar on

reconciliation years ago on the island of Crete, led by a Greek philosopher named Alexander Papaderos, many of whose family members and friends had been killed by the Nazis during the German invasion of Greece in World War II. At the end of his seminar, Dr. Papaderos asked the group, as seminar leaders often do, "Do you have any questions?" Bob Fulghum raised his hand and asked the biggest possible question of all, "*WHAT IS THE MEANING OF LIFE?*"

Papaderos didn't sidestep the question. Instead he said, "I'll answer that." Then he took out his billfold and fished around in it 'til he found a little round mirror, about the size of a quarter. He said:

"When I was a small child, during World War II, we were very poor and lived in a remote village in Greece. One day, on the road, I found the broken pieces of a mirror. I tried to find all the pieces and put them together, but that was not possible, so I only kept the largest piece. This one here. By scratching it on a stone, I made it round. I began to play with it as a toy and became fascinated that I could reflect light into dark places where the sun would never shine — into deep holes and crevices and dark closets. It became a game for me to reflect light into the most inaccessible places I could find.

"I kept the little mirror, and as I grew up I would continue to take it out in idle moments and play the game of shining the light into difficult places. As I became a man, I grew to understand that I am not the light or the source of the light. But the light is there, and it will only shine in many of these dark places *if I reflect it*. ...This is what I'm about. This is the meaning of my life."

Those of us who have responded to Jesus are about the business of shining His light into all kinds of dark places, reflecting love and hope and forgiveness and peace. To change my metaphor a little bit (without changing the message), I might say that if the light we shine in the world comes only out of *us*, it will sooner or later grow dim and burn out, like a flashlight whose batteries have gone dead. To keep our light shining, we have to be connected to the unfailing power supply, and that power supply is Christ. He is the energy that gives us our light. Our light is *His* light, too.

Over the door leading out from the church there will be, in six-inch high letters, the words: "*LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE.*" Turn around and look, the words are up there on a paper strip this morning, exactly where they will be in permanent letters in the future. We will look at those words every time we leave the church to go out into the world: "*Let your light shine.*"

Don't sell YOUR light short. Let it shine! Don't minimize what YOUR light might accomplish. Let it shine! We all know the children's song, "*This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.*" Your light might seem quite small to you, but when you shine it in the right place or for the right person, your little light can make the deciding difference.

When Jesus was talking to his disciples, he didn't say, "Some of you – the exceptionally gifted and chosen ones – you are the light of the world." He didn't say, "You might be" or "With some hard work, you might have the potential to be" the light of the world. What he said was, "You *are* the light of the world."

If we have come to Christ, we have been lit as a lamp of the Lord. And as long as we stay plugged into the unfailing power supply, *we'll keep shining.*

This beautiful, sacred space, this new center for ministry which we begin to occupy this morning – as I have said so many times in the last couple of years – is merely a *tool*. It is not an end in itself. It is a means to an end. Its purpose is to help us, as a congregation, shine our light more brightly and more effectively for the benefit of those around us.

Joan and I lived in Michigan before we moved to Aspen, and there are many lighthouses all around the two peninsulas of Michigan. I think of this new building as being like the prismatic glass Fresnel lenses that were one of the greatest inventions of the first half of the 19th century. The Fresnel lens would narrow and concentrate the light of a kerosene flame so that it would shine twenty miles out to sea from a lighthouse, to keep sailing vessels from foundering on the rocks. This church is meant to be a kind of “lighthouse” for the Lord.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said that we were to let our light shine “so that others might see our good works” and give glory to our Father in heaven. We have work to do: God’s work. This new building is intended to help us accomplish that work.

Inserted in each of the bulletin booklets this morning is a tan card with something printed on it. I want you to take that card out and look at it. Last Tuesday morning, as I was praying and writing in my prayer journal as I do almost every day, I had the sense that the Lord had something to say to me, for our church. For all of us. So I wrote it down, and it’s printed on that card. The Lord said this:

“I will do a new thing in this place, if you are willing to cooperate with me and with one another. It will be a healing work. It will be a work of renewal. It will be a work of the Spirit, not the flesh.

“Offer this new building to Me with sincere hearts. Offer it to Me, and I will accept it. But offerings like this, sacrifices like this, must be unconditional. If you offer Me this edifice, I will accept it and I will use it in ways you might not yet imagine and of which you might not approve, for My ways are not your ways; My ways are higher than your ways!

“But more than this house of stone and metal and glass, I want you to offer Me your hearts. Give Me your hearts, and I will renew your life, your affections, your vocation, and your sense of purpose.

“Open your hearts and open your doors. Expect that I will do a new thing. When you see what I am doing, you will be glad, if you truly love Me.”

It would be fair for you to ask, “How can you say these words are ‘God’s word’? How do you know?” All I can tell you is this: I have heard the Lord before, and this *sounds* like Him to me!

Therefore, I present the words that are printed on this card to you today as an invitation from God—an invitation *and* a warning. The Lord says that He will do a new thing among us, IF we’re willing to cooperate with Him and with each other... a work of healing and renewal, a work of the Spirit and not the flesh. IF we offer this new building to Him as a gift – with no strings attached – He will accept it, and He will use it for His own purposes, His own work—work which He warns could surprise or even shock us – since *God’s* ways are not *our* ways, His ways are higher than our ways. God invites us to open our hearts and open the doors of this church and

trust Him to use it, if we love Him. We DO love Him; therefore, let's do what He asks of us, and do it right now. Please stand and join with me in offering our church to God.

Priest: We have built on the sure foundation, Jesus Christ our Lord.

People: **Father, we give this house to you.**

We have been touched by your Spirit and summoned by your love.

Father, we give our hearts to you.

We have heard your call to serve others as Jesus, your Son, served us.

Father, we give our hands to you.

We have the Light of Christ kindled within us. We are lamps lit by the Lord.

Father, we give our lives to you. Make us shine with Christ's light in this place, to help your children find their way home to you.

Amen.