



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

May 13, 2018

"Lighting The Darkness" - Hope Restored Sermon Series

The Rev. Tim Shaw

Mark 4:21 (*Jesus*) said to them, "Is a lamp brought in to be put under the bushel basket, or under the bed, and not on the lamp stand? ²² For there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed; nor is anything secret, except to come to light. ²³ Let anyone with ears to hear listen!" ²⁴ And He said to them, "Pay attention to what you hear; the measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given you. ²⁵ For to those who have, more will be given; and from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away."

For many years, I had, what I now think, was a completely incorrect understanding of what Jesus is saying in verse 22. He says to his disciples, "For there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed; nor is anything secret, except to come to light." I don't know about you, but this verse used to freak me out just a little. It was not good news to me that everything that is now hidden will one day be disclosed and that all secrets will eventually come to light.

I remember a time I was in Mexicali, Mexico with my high school students when I was the

youth pastor for First Presbyterian Church of Berkeley. We were there as a part of Azusa Pacific University's Mexicali Outreach. That annual mission usually involved well over 3000 high school students from the States. It was an veritable adolescent invasion of a neighbor country. We were there to lead a vacation Bible school for a local church in a nearby village.

One morning as we lay in our tents, rubbing the sleep from our eyes, the morning inspirational message was broadcast throughout the camp on loud speakers. After the "Okay-Let's-Get-Fired-Up" Christian music stopped, someone in a very cheery voice came on the PA and said, "Good morning campers! Remember, secret sins don't remain secret." As I lay there in my tent I thought to myself, "Well, that's a fantastic thought for the day. How am I going to explain that one to my students?"

So, what is Jesus talking about in regards to lamps, secrets and measures? If I'm right, that Jesus is not talking about sharing every wayward thought I've ever had with

everyone in the world, what is He talking about?

Before I take a whack at that one, let's first take a look at verse 21. Jesus said to His disciples, "Is a lamp brought in to be put under the bushel basket, or under the bed, and not on the lamp stand?"

Jesus is asking His disciples a very basic question about the purpose of light. Specifically He asks about what you do when you light a lamp and bring it into a dark room. Where do you put it? Do you cover it up with a basket or put it under the bed? If you do, there's a pretty good chance you're going to not just light up the room, you might just set it on fire and possibly burn it to the ground.

You light a lamp not to hide it under a basket or under the bed. You light a lamp and put it on a lamp stand so it will illuminate the room. That seems like a no-brainer to me. So, what is Jesus talking about?

He likes this discussion about lights, lamps and bushel baskets a lot. He talks about all of this in the Sermon on the Mount. In fact, He's already answered His own question in Matthew 5:15.

At the beginning of his most famous sermon, Jesus tells His disciples in

Matthew 5:14 *“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵ No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lamp stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ 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.”* So no, you don't light a lamp and then hide that light. You bring it into a dark room. You put in a place where it can light up the darkness.

This sentence is a lot more interesting in Greek. Literally, the verse reads, “The lamp comes into the room” and that seems like a very strange thing to say. What kind of house is this where objects, like lamps, come into a room on their own? The fact that Jesus makes the lamp the subject of the sentence in Greek tells us that there is a deeper meaning we need to dig for.

When Jesus talks about the lamp coming into the room He's talking about Himself. He is the Light of the world. He has come into the world to light up the darkness. But, strangely enough, His coming into the world is actually hidden at first. But just like the lamp the ultimate goal of the Light of the world coming into human history is not that he remain hidden but that he might light up our lives and our world.

The next statement Jesus makes, the one about everything being revealed, is difficult to

understand unless we go back a few verses and pick up something very important and bring it forward into this verse.

A few years ago, I was visiting some friends of mine in Houston just after Thanksgiving. They were getting ready to decorate their house for Christmas. They lived in a really nice neighborhood south of the city. Their block was lined with very nice homes. Most of their neighbors had paid to have their houses professionally decorated. I didn't even know that was a thing.

My friends chose not to pay someone to put up their Christmas lights. On their own, they made a star out of pieces of wood. They decorated that star with white Christmas lights and gave it a tail, they ran an extension cord across the lawn to the tree where they hung that star. Once the star was set, we draped multi-colored Christmas lights over their shrubs and waited for night to fall.

For even a display as simple as that to work, the lights covering the shrubs near the house had to be connected to the lights on the star. To get the whole display to light up and see the message of good tidings of great joy that they were trying to share with all their neighbors, we had to make sure the right cords were connected.

Something very similar to that process needs to happen when you study the Bible. You have to know what came before the passage you're reading to make

sure you correctly understand the meaning of the passage you are studying.

Okay, let's now connect my metaphorical Christmas lights. Listen again to what Jesus says in this once unnerving verse. Verse 22. *“For there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed; nor is anything secret, except to come to light.”* Exactly what secret will one day come to light? Well, let's walk back across our metaphorical lawn and pick up the cord leading to the rest of the Christmas lights.

Jesus has already told us what secret He's talking about. It's not our hidden failures that will be revealed to the world. It's the secret of the kingdom of God that will be fully revealed. Let's look back at Mark 4 verse 10. His disciples have been scratching their heads trying to figure out the meaning of Jesus' story about the different soils, so they ask Him, *“What are you trying to say to us?”*

Look again at verse 10, Mark 4:10 *When (Jesus) was alone, those who were around him along with the twelve asked him about the parables. ¹¹ And He said to them, “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables...”*

The secret that will one day be fully revealed to all of humanity is not your secret failings but the secret of the kingdom of God and at the heart of that secret is one remarkable person, Jesus Christ.

And the surprising secret of the kingdom of God that is wrapped up in Jesus is that our God is a God of mercy and grace, a God who forgives and heals, a God who restores and repairs.

The secret of the kingdom of God is that God is not mad at you, He's reaching out to you in love and compassion. That is the shocking secret of the kingdom of God. Sadly, that truth remains hidden to many across our world. Maybe it remains hidden to you this morning.

God comes to us in human form and that means that a good deal of His glory remains hidden. If God were to show up in all his glory right now, If we could see the full extent of his love and grace we would explode with joy in His presence.

So, the secret of who God actually is must first come to us hidden. But it's not supposed to remain hidden. One day it will be revealed fully to the world and you and I who know this secret are called to be people who share this secret with others.

Jesus is the light that comes into our darkness. Even if that light is somewhat hidden for now, enough of that light is shining to change our world and us. That light Jesus brings helps us see the way things really are. We see our need and our brokenness in the light of who he is. But that light can also heal and transform our busted up lives.

Brennan Manning writes in his book, *The Ragamuffin Gospel*, that we all have shadows and skeletons in our backgrounds. But he reminds us that there is something bigger in this world and that something bigger is full of grace and mercy, full of patience and ingenuity. When we're out of ideas and options, Jesus never is. Manning says that the moment the focus of our lives shifts from what isn't working in our lives to what Jesus can do, lots of things begin to change.

When the question I ask myself is no longer, "What have I done?" but "What can He do?" I can begin to forgive myself because He has forgiven me. I can start rebuilding those parts of my life I thought were a loss. There is grace to help in every time of trouble, that grace is the secret we encounter when we draw close to Jesus.

It is such good news to me that the secrets that will be revealed to the world are not a detailed exposé of my brokenness. I'm glad that in Heaven we're not going to have nightly showings of the real story of each of our lives. Tonight at 8 pm come see Tim Shaw's *Life: His Blunders, Bloopers and Brokenness*. That's what I once thought verse 22 might mean but that just reflects how greatly I once misunderstood who Jesus is. Our God is a good, kind, and patient, compassionate and merciful God.

In that same book, Brennan Manning goes on to tell this

story about God's incredible grace. He writes, "Perhaps you've heard this story: Several years ago in a large city in the far West, rumors spread that a certain Catholic woman was having visions of Jesus. The reports reached the archbishop. He decided to check her out "Is it true, ma'am, that you have visions of Jesus?" asked the cleric. "Yes," the woman replied simply. "Well, the next time you have a vision, I want you to ask Jesus to tell you the sins that I confessed in my last confession."

The woman was stunned. "Did I hear you right, bishop? You actually want me to ask Jesus to tell me the sins of your past?" "Exactly, Please call me if anything happens." Ten days later the woman notified her spiritual leader of a recent (encounter with Jesus). "Please come," she said. Within the hour the archbishop arrived.

"You just told me on the telephone that you actually had a vision of Jesus. Did you do what I asked?" "Yes, bishop, I asked Jesus to tell me the sins you confessed in your last confession." The bishop leaned forward with anticipation. His eyes narrowed.

What did Jesus say?" She took his hand and gazed deep into his eyes. "Bishop," she said, "these are His exact words: 'I can't remember.'" ¹ That is the depth of the forgiveness that is offered to us by our God. Those places of hidden brokenness are not a problem for Jesus. In fact, they are not a secret to him at all.

He knows all about them and loves us still. He tenderly invites us to bring the whole truth about our whole lives to him because He can do something about those broken places if we place them in his hands.

My friend and mentor Earl Palmer, the senior pastor at First Presbyterian Berkeley, when I came to serve that church right out of seminary, once told the story about the time he was at a staff barbecue out on Lake Washington. That was when he was the senior pastor of University Presbyterian Church in Seattle.

As people were playing in the lake or sitting along the shore, he was busy tending the BBQ. As he chatted it up with his friends and colleagues, he set his Root Beer bottle down on the picnic table behind him. When he went to pick it up to take a drink he hadn't realized that a bunch of wasps had flown inside the bottle of Root Beer. So when he took a drink, a wasp stung him on the tongue. His tongue almost immediately began to swell.

A few of his fellow staff members saw what happened and rushed over to see what was going on. When they realized he'd drunk from a bottle filled with wasps and that at least one of them had stung him on the tongue, they all began to say, "Let me have a look. Let me see. Oh, that's not good." They were elbowing one another out of the way to see if they could get a good look at what had happened.

When something hard happens in your life, the last thing you need is a bunch of people who just want to satisfy their curiosity with all the juicy details. You want someone who can do something that will actually help you come to terms with what has happened. It really doesn't help to have a bunch of curious people who want to watch your tongue swell up in your mouth.

They rushed Earl to the hospital and in the emergency room he was greeted by a doctor who attended University Presbyterian Church. He brought Earl back to one of the examining rooms, sat him down and said, "Let me have a look."

That is a completely different sentence when it is said by someone who has the ability to help you. They're not just curious; they know what to look for and how to heal it. The doctor skillfully removed the stinger from Earl's tongue, gave him some medication and sent him home to rest.

Jesus is that kind of person who has the skills to bring healing to those hidden hurts in our lives. When He says, "Let me have a look," we know we can trust Him with even those hidden places we might be afraid to reveal to anyone. And frequently, Jesus uses His disciples to bring that healing. But He does that only when a community of Christ-followers is a safe, trusted place where we can be honest about the busted up places in our lives. That is the kind of church I hope we want to be.

Today's passage concludes with these words from Jesus, "*23 Let anyone with ears to hear listen!*" *24 And He said to them, "Pay attention to what you hear;"* That's a super important exhortation from Jesus. "Where are you going to get your information about life?" Is it life-giving information or is it information that is draining the life right out of you?

Jesus says, "*Come to me. I'm the one who can help you.*" If you've discovered the secret of His love and mercy and grace, Jesus says, "*Let me make you into a person of love and mercy and grace.*" He goes on to say, "*the measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given you.*" *25 For to those who have, more will be given; and from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away."*

He's reaching back to what He has just said in his parable about the quality of the soil in which the word is planted. If the word is sown on rich soil it will produce even more. But if this word of truth about the secret of the kingdom of God falls on hard ground, it will eventually be snatched away.

This brief and challenging saying by Jesus is a reminder that we will be measured by the standard we use to measure others. Are we just curious about the failings of others so we can use those failings to make ourselves feel better about ourselves? Or are we people who know what it's like to have Jesus start to heal us?

Are we people who can place the busted up parts of our lives in the hands of Jesus and watch him begin to transform them?

The extent to which we allow the kingdom of Jesus to fill our lives, the more we work at understanding and knowing the secret that is at the heart of it, the more we desire to become like the gracious, kind, patient and wise King who is ruling that kingdom is the degree that we will experience the kingdom and reflect that kingdom to the world. And the more you get it the more will be given to you.

The kingdom comes into our world hidden. It's a secret, but it is a secret that is to be proclaimed everywhere. If we want to know what to proclaim and how to proclaim it, we must know the One who is the Secret at the heart of this kingdom of grace and mercy. We must know and trust His great love for us and then go into the world to show and share that love with the world.

1 Manning, Brennan. The Ragamuffin Gospel: Good News for the Bedraggled, Beat-Up, and Burnt Out (pp. 118-119). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

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Note: Sunday sermon texts are also available at fpchawaii.org The audio version can be downloaded from iTunes. You may also request the audio version by visiting: fpchkoolau@gmail.com