

I was musing lately that in over 66 years of life and 40 years of ministry, I have learned several great truths that I can share with our four grandchildren as they get older. A sampling of those would be:

1. No matter how hard you try, you can't baptize cats.
2. You can't trust dogs to watch your food.
3. Don't sneeze when someone is cutting your hair.
4. You can't hide a piece of broccoli in a glass of milk. And...
5. The best place to be when you're sad is Grandpa's lap.

Then as I was reading the scriptures for today and thinking about the adult mission team that we've commissioned and the confirmands that (are joining) the church today, I thought of another great truth that's good for all of us: You can't hide a lighted candle in a dark room—nor should we try. In John we read Jesus' words, "I am the light of the world." Then in Matthew he turns it around and proclaims, "You are the light of the world."

Theologian William Barclay reflects, "It may well be said that this is the greatest compliment that was ever paid to the individual Christian, for Christ commands the Christian to be what he himself claimed to be—light of the world."

Young or old, we may feel overwhelmed with such a directive, but Barclay goes on to explain, "We are not commanded to produce our own light, but to shine with the reflection of Christ's light from within." Our decision to allow Christ to come into our lives, forgive our sins & live through us—reflecting his light through us, if you will—is what we Christians call making a commitment to Christ. Confirmands examine what Christian commitment looks like. But, for all of us, sometimes it's hard to get the big picture.

As I was thinking about what committed Christian discipleship looks like to me, I remembered years ago when I was on a farm and the farmer used a three-legged footstool to milk the cow. This was before the machines they use today. How many of you have seen one of those stools? On an uneven barn floor it will not rock like a four-legged one and makes the job of milking much easier.

That's how I view Christian commitment—like a three-legged stool. It involves commitment to Christ, commitment to the church, and also commitment to the community. It's another great truth for us to learn. All three areas of commitment are equally important and must be kept in balance for our Christian discipleship to be most effective.

Without Christ we have no foundation, no light within.

Without the church we have no fellowship, no means to nurture the light.

Without the community, near or far, we have no place to share the light.

Commitment to community through service is the practical aspect of these three elements of Christian discipleship and what I want us to think about today.

I'm reminded of a story I recently read that took place during WWII. Five hundred soldiers were attending a performance of Rigoletto in an Italian opera house. An air raid caused all of the lights to go out, leaving the room in darkness. A GI took out his flashlight and began to shine it toward the stage. Soon the rest

of the soldiers joined him by doing the same thing. The conductor bowed, waved his baton, and continued the performance. Our calling as a church is to be a community of shining lights in a dark world so God's work can continue. We cannot and should not hide our light.

But a couple questions come to mind as I think about commitment to the community: Why should we pursue it? And, What can we do?

"Why" may be the easier of the two questions. Sometimes a parent who can't adequately explain some important family rule to a young child will just revert to the proverbial, "Because I said so!" In the simplest of answers to why we should get involved with other people's needs even though our own may be pressing—is because Jesus told us to do it! Jesus said, "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

This is not a "theatrical goodness" we share with others to make ourselves look good. When Christians share the light—the love and grace of Christ within—the world sees these attractive deeds and they draw attention to God, not us. It's putting our Sunday faith into Monday action.

Last year Pat and I visited the Farm and Science Review in London, Ohio, near Springfield. In one of the booths I had to answer a question to get a free square yardstick. My question was: True or False: "One of the seven principles of the Ohio Rural Electric Cooperatives is 'Commitment to Community?'" I answered, "Absolutely!" And walked away with my yardstick! Later I mused, does the church know one of our main principles is "commitment to community?" God not only wants to bless us and our church, but the communities around us as well.

However, I know some still don't "get it." They're like the neatly printed message that was taped to a vending machine that read: "This machine reserves the right to refuse service to anyone, anytime." If you've ever been thwarted by a vending machine you smile at the idea of its conscious refusal of service. Yet how often have we had similar attitudes toward others who need our assistance? Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan to remind us to love our neighbors in practical ways no matter what their race, creed, or net worth. He was teaching us not only to **GO** to church, but also to **BE** the church.

For others of us, commitment to community and service to others is already part of our understanding of Christianity. In preacher terms, I'm "preaching to the choir." But in this self-indulgent society that constantly asks, "What about me? What about me?"—it's increasingly difficult for us to maintain that commitment and to pass it along to our children, grandchildren, and new members. In addition, our world is so hectic and filled with darkness, bringing a logical fear of strangers, that we're stretched to put Christ's directive into action.

Yet, we still ask that second question, "What can I do? The darkness is so great and my light is so small."

In response to that thinking Pastor Ron Rand once said, "I am but one person but I am one! I cannot do everything but I can do something. What I can contribute I should and I will. I will work with what I've got." That's a good philosophy for all of us. Remember, darkness cannot hide the light, no matter how small the flame.

We can contribute time, skill, or money to meet needs outside the church—all are important. Our own church offers opportunities to serve both near and far.

For instance, we collect food and money to help the hungry here in Clintonville. And, (as you saw) our adult mission team (is going to/has left for) New Orleans to work with Habitat. Almost six years after Katrina the devastation is still great. They are also taking supplies to tornado- torn Alabama.

A couple years ago a friend of ours received a note from someone living in McComb, Mississippi and sent it along to us. The young man writes:

What have I seen since Katrina?

- Christian people giving & giving, going all-out to minister in Jesus' name.
- Neighbors going door-to-door helping one another.
- Out of town volunteers coming with food & staying for a week.
- The Red Cross & Salvation Army doing a great job.
- Doctors, nurses & others working tirelessly.

Then he goes on to list: What I have not seen?

- The ACLU setting up a feeding line
- The American Atheist organization serving meals in shelters

Whether this young man was a Christian or not, he got the message: Churches send Christians from all over the country to do what Christians do in a crisis—let their light shine.

But, do you think there has to be a major crisis to serve the community? I hope not. Those needs are just easier to see and we hear more about them.

- Have you heard that our youth from Maple Grove are also going on a mission trip in June to Charleston, SC, working with Rural Mission Inc?
- Have you heard about the group of lawyers called Interfaith Legal Services who volunteer at pro-bono clinics in area churches in several counties in OH?
- Have you heard of the lady who bakes pies and takes them to those in her church or neighborhood who are grieving or hurting with a note saying, "I care. I'm praying for you."
- Have you heard about the 91 year old lady who calls people all over the country who need some encouragement and plays a tune or two on her piano for them, letting them know she cares about them?

I could go on & on—and I bet you could, too. You know of people who have volunteered their time, talent, or money to help a neighbor, a community, or a cause—not for their own glory, but out of their willingness to get outside of themselves and their own needs to lend a hand to others. Maybe you have been one of those people. If so, I say thank you. In Ben Franklin's words you've proven, **"Well done is better than well said!"**

A few years ago the expression "random acts of kindness" became popular. That's good, but think about it for a moment. "Random" means "haphazard," "hit or miss." Is that what communities need? Is that what we are to practice as Christians? Random acts of kindness won't save our nation, our communities, our

neighbors. They are too inconsistent. Jesus calls us to “intentional acts of kindness.” He calls us to be lights in the world, to be thoughtful, purposeful, and consistent with our acts of kindness. Because as the old saying goes, “**People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.**” We have to care “on purpose.” Compassion becomes our passion.

I certainly don’t have all the answers, but I come today with two more questions for your consideration:

First: What do you care about—and, what are you willing to do about it?

And second: How will you share the light of Christ with others?

Each one here will have different answers. But as we determine the answers, I hope they will reflect the great truth in the words to a song by Kathy Troccoli which challenge all of us to:

**“Carry your candle, Go light your world!”**