

## Cutting Through the Darkness

[Text - Matthew 5:13-20]

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February 5, 2017

A man calls his mechanic and says, "Something's wrong with my car. My headlights don't work." The mechanic says, "Well, your battery's probably dead." "No," the owner argues, "My horn still works, so it can't be the battery." The mechanic replies, "Actually, it *can* be your battery; you see, it takes a lot more power to light-up a highway than to just blow your own horn!" [...says the person who literally just blew his own horn...]

Jesus says, "*You* are the light of the world.... No one after lighting a lamp puts it under a bushel basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Heavenly Parent." Jesus observes that there's a distinct difference between a strict and structured *religion*, which focuses on personal piety and self-righteous pride; and a sincere and selfless *faith*, which practices Divine compassion for others. Unfortunately, many of the highly religious people in Jesus' day [like many today] seem far more interested in touting their own piety and purity, than in reflecting the pure light and love of the Holy One. They prefer to toot their own horn and diminish others, rather than lighting their path and lifting them up.

Because of this, much of Jesus' ministry involves challenging those who use their religious or political power - their wealth and social privilege - to oppress and denigrate the poor and vulnerable, the outcast and the "outsider". As one whose mission is to shine Divine light and love throughout the world, Jesus gives his all to enhance and brighten the lives of others - to raise their spirits and lighten their load. And he does this, not out of a reluctant sense of religious duty, but with a refreshing spirit of Divine energy and excitement, enthusiasm and joy! And the remarkable thing that happens in response to Jesus' wonderful words of grace and acts of compassion, is that those rejected and dejected individuals turn their lives around. It's as if a

light turns-on within them, as they realize that they are connected with and loved by the very Source that brings them - and all things - into being. And the truth of Jesus' message takes-hold of their hearts: "You are the light of the world.... [now] let *your* light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Heavenly Parent!"

There really is a 'night and day' difference between a ridged *religion* that demands obedience and promotes judgmental self-righteousness, and a freeing *faith* which inspires compassion and kindness, hope and joy. Even some 750 years before Jesus, the prophet Isaiah addresses this very issue. Speaking on behalf of the Holy One, Isaiah declares "Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high.... Is not *this* the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house?.... *Then* your light shall break-forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring-up quickly!"

Light, by it's very nature, illuminates everything around it. It exposes the ugly injustice of bigotry and hatred, prejudice and oppression. Light cuts-through the darkness of fear and deception, and reveals the truth of Divine compassion and grace. Jesus says, "You are the light of the world!" That's a marvelous compliment, as well as a sobering and sacred calling. As the light of the world, you and I today are charged with the task of bringing hope and encouragement, relief and refuge to *all* our sisters and brothers - especially those who need it most:

By sharing their struggles and lightening their burdens;

By listening to their concerns, and helping them find their way through Life's dark times and desperate situations;

By letting them know that they are not alone on the journey.

One final - and encouraging - thought about the Light that we carry, is that it truly is a light that we can joyfully and freely *share*. When one candle is used to light another, the light of the first isn't diminished one bit; it still shines as brightly and brilliantly as before! In the same way,

the light and love, the compassion and kindness that you and I receive from Christ and pass on to others, doesn't diminish one iota. In fact, it actually shines brighter and more glorious, the more we share it; because it is in the sharing and through our caring, that the darkness of deception, fear and hatred is ultimately overcome. This doesn't give us cause to blow our own horn; but it can give us tremendous joy, and give true glory to our Heavenly Parent!