

**Isaiah 42:5-9** <sup>5</sup> Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it: <sup>6</sup> I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness. I have taken you by the hand and kept you. I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, <sup>7</sup> to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. <sup>8</sup> I am the Lord, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols. <sup>9</sup> See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them.

**Matthew 5:13-16** <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.

Isaiah 42:5-9 and Matthew 5:13-16  
10/21/2018 – Saginaw First U.M.C.  
“A Light In The Darkness”  
Rev. Amy Terhune

Most of you probably know, or are at least aware, that I have been a big fan of the rock band U2 for a long time. As a kid, I liked them because my cousin liked them. She is 5 years older than me, and back then, she was the benchmark of coolness. In my adolescence and continuing into my adult years, however, my admiration of them has been rooted more in their ability and willingness to use their stardom to advance causes I care about—like environmental preservation, alleviating the AIDS crisis in Africa, relieving third world nations of debt, and combatting hunger and poverty, and advocating for equality and peace in the Middle East, Myanmar, Ireland, and here in the US.

It has become their custom, of a sort, to include somewhere on their albums—usually at the end, but not always—a song religious in nature. I am going to open the sermon this morning with the final song off their album ‘How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb’. The song I’m going to play is entitled “Yahweh”, which is the Hebrew word for “I AM”—Yahweh is God’s name, revealed in Exodus 3. This song is a courageous prayer, and it’s one I share.

*Play “Yahweh”*

The reason I chose to open with this song this morning is because it struck me as fitting for what we’ve been discussing the past several weeks. As we’ve looked at major metaphors for the divine presence in the world and in us, we’ve talked about being an oasis in the desert and a shelter in the storm. Today, we look at being a light in the darkness. If you paid attention to the words, you’ll note that U2 quoted Christ from today’s lesson: a city should be shining on a hill. Encapsulated in the lyrics is a plea for a future, for purity, for joy, for guidance and discernment about what is most important in life. They want to be less critical and more loving. I think they articulate beautifully the feeling many of us have about the Kingdom of God—still I’m waiting for the dawn. They sense it coming—how much longer do we wait, trapped in our dead-end streets, our filth and corruption, our skin and bones, our dark nights? How much longer will humankind carry in our hands what is worthless, and speak what is dehumanizing? How small and pathetic is the droplet of our love for God and for others when compared with the ocean of God’s love for humankind. When will our cities, our communities, our fellowships, our churches live out the commission to let the light shine? And this is what I think is most

courageous—a prayer I pray with difficulty—take this heart and make it break. Break down the apathy and indifference, the sense of defeat and futility, those things that seem to calcify in our hearts and make them hard, brittle and cold. Psalm 51 reminds us, “The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit. A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” We should be broken-hearted when we look at the world around us, because in the broken heart is the power of the Holy Spirit given free and full reign.

Jesus puts it another way. You are God’s people in the world. You are salt. You are light. Those are identity statements. You are. Not you are becoming salt and light; or you will be salt and light; or you might be salt and light someday if you get it right. No. You are salt. You are light. Translation: You have work to do, a purpose to fulfill. You are necessary. And we are. You are salt. You are light. That’s who we’re called to be. My job, as your pastor, is to equip you to be who you’re called to be.

“... One of the most misunderstood words of our day is the word "minister", because people use it as a synonym for someone like me who is ordained or theologically trained in a seminary. You might be surprised to learn that the word "minister" derives from the Latin word for "servant" and is based on the root word "minus" which means "less." [from “Member Means Minister” by James Merritt, [www.sermons.com](http://www.sermons.com).] I am a pastor. All of us our ministers.

There’s an amusing little illustration making the rounds on the internet right now that drives this point home by comparing a church with a football team. You know me, I love football, so here goes...

“Imagine that we are TV sportscasters standing on the sidelines of a football game to give the play-by-play.

“In the first scene, the team nearest us is standing together, heads bowed in prayer, with the coach in the center. Suddenly they give a great cheer, and the coach trots out onto the field by himself while the players go sit on the bench. "What's going on?" we ask as we stick a microphone in front of a 250-pound guard. "What's the coach doing out there?" "Oh, he's going to play today." "All by himself?" "Sure, why not? He's had a lot more experience and training than the rest of us. We've got a lot of rookies on this team, and we might make mistakes. Anyway, they pay the coach well. We're all here to cheer and support him and look at the huge crowd that's come to watch him play!" Bewildered, we watch as the opposing team kicks off. The coach catches the ball. He valiantly charges upfield, but is buried under eleven opposing tacklers. He's carried off half-conscious...

The parallels should be obvious. As your pastor, I’m not paid to do ministry. I’m paid to equip you all for ministry. Even more, I’m called by God to do that. If that gets turned around, everybody loses.

“Now look at Scene #2: The team realizes they've all got to play, so they're on the field in a huddle. They huddle...and huddle...and huddle. The referee calls a penalty for delaying the game and moves the ball back five yards. Still the team huddles, huddles, and huddles. The referee calls penalty after penalty, until finally the ball is moved all the way back to their own goal line. "Hey coach!" shouts the quarterback to the sidelines. "This is the greatest huddle I've ever been in. We have the best fellowship... and some of these guys are amazing students of the play book. We learn so much in this huddle!" "But why don't you get up on the line and play?" "Why should we? What we want are bigger and better huddles! Besides, we might get hurt. No one ever got hurt in a huddle!" [4 ¶s from illustrations on service, [www.esermons.com](http://www.esermons.com). Author unknown.]

Again, the parallels are obvious. The huddle is not the game. This worship service is not ministry. We are called and created for ministry. And when we get out beyond our skin and our walls with our gifts, our love, our reverence, our all, we meet Christ at the line of scrimmage. To be light is to imitate Jesus. The gospel of John says that Jesus is the Light that has come into the world, which the darkness could not overcome. But Jesus says that WE are called and created for to be light in the world.

This may surprise you, but light today sometimes gets a bad rap. Ask anyone who studies the stars or the sky for a living and they’ll tell you all about the evils of “light pollution!” The blazing of our cities and urban sprawl is slowly cutting us off from the universe beyond our atmosphere. And

everywhere in society, the harsh glare of the spotlight highlights the lavish, the decadent, the glitz and glamor of human stardom. We have learned how to use lights to imprison and starve the soul. But according to the creation story, light was created by God to engender growth, to enable sight, and to guide. When God's light is at work in and through us, we do grow, we discern wisely, we have a sense of where we need to be going, and we share it with others.

Light is necessary for healthy lives. It's been proven that individuals who don't get enough sunlight may experience something called Seasonal Affect Disorder – or SAD. It's a kind of depression that comes on usually in winter, in darker days. I had a colleague who served the UMC in Nome, Alaska for several years. She talked about the vital importance of the invention of full-spectrum lamps. During the polar winter, when the sun doesn't rise until 11am and sets by 3pm, full spectrum lamps have made a marked difference in people's psychological health. Light is healthy. Light is life-giving. Without it, our bodies and our spirits die.

“One December back in the late 70s or early 80s, a university professor was invited to speak at a military base. He was met at an airport by a soldier named Ralph. This is the professor's story: “After we introduced ourselves to each other, we headed toward the baggage claim area. But Ralph kept disappearing. Once he stopped to help an older woman with her baggage. Once he stopped to lift a little boy up to see Santa Claus, and again, he paused to give directions to someone who was lost.” Finally I said to him, “Where did you learn that?”

“Learn what?” asked Ralph.

“Where did you learn to live like that?”

And Ralph replied, “In Vietnam, my job was to clear the mine fields. You never knew which step might be your last, so I made up my mind to live between the steps. After a couple of years, that just got ingrained in my nature, I guess, and so I just keep living that way. All told, it's not a bad way to live.” [adapted from “This Little Light of Mine” by Dr. J. Howard Olds]

Ralph is so right, isn't he? Living between the steps, seeing each day as precious, stopping to help another—that's a lot more than “not a bad way” to live. That's a great way to live, and no doubt a meaningful one, even if it's not easy. Ralph knew something that the truly wise throughout time have figured out—that being light is a healthy and productive way of living in the world. And not just for ourselves, but for everyone. When we let our lights shine, we don't take a break at the grocery store or the park or the golf course or the ski trails or at our kids school or our mother's nursing home or a restaurant or on vacation or at the bank.

Rev. James Merritt once wrote that “Mature Christians are interested in service (one word). Immature Christians are interested in serve us (two words).” In a consumer culture service is serve us. But Christian service is other-focused. We are called and created to care for others.

Finally, and I can't stress this enough, to be light is to have hope. U2 sings, “Still I'm waiting for the dawn.” But we do believe it will come. As Christians, we are asked to stretch ourselves until we believe that the world can, is, and will change for better. The United Methodist Church has stated its mission thusly: to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. I mentioned that last week. Do you believe that it's possible to transform our world? I do. I think a lot of you do also. We believe the world can be better, brighter. We live in hope.

There were once two boys who were twins. One was quite down on life in general—rather pessimistic. The other always seemed full of hope and a positive spirit. The parents were worried about the extremes of behavior and attitude and finally took the boys in to see a psychologist. The psychologist observed them a while and determined that both boys could be easily helped.

He said that they had a room filled with all the toys a boy could want. They would put the pessimist in that room and allow him to enjoy life a little. They also had another room that they filled with horse manure. They put the optimist in that room and teach him something of harsh reality. They observed both boys through one-way mirrors. Interestingly, the pessimist continued to be a pessimist. He looked around at all the toys, but complained about color or brand, and finally pouted that he had no

one to play with. They went to look in on the optimist, and were astounded to find him digging through the manure. The psychologist ran into the room and asked what on earth the boy was doing. He replied that with all that manure, he was sure there had to be a pony in the room somewhere. [2 ¶s from illustrations on hope, www.esermons.com.]

Folks, sometimes there's a lot of manure to dig through. But we serve because we truly can make a difference in the world.

Once upon a time, a Mississippi country preacher prayed before he preached, and as he prayed, he got more and more charged up. His prayer went like this: "O Lord, give this thy servant this morning the eyes of an eagle, and the wisdom of an owl. Illuminate my brow with the sun of heaven, and possess my mind with the love of people. Turpentine my imagination. Grease my lips. Electrify my brain with the light of the Word and fill me plumb full of dynamite for thy glory. Anoint me all over with the kerosene of salvation and set me on fire!" [from "This Little Light of Mine" by Dr. J. Howard Olds, www.sermons.com.]

I'll bet a lot of folks didn't have the foggiest idea what to do with that prayer. We can chuckle at it, but you know, being light isn't always a spectacular explosion. Sometimes it's a careful and controlled burn that works steadily for decades, writing letters to representatives in congress until they do something about climate change, or until Malaria drops from millions of victims, to thousands, to hundreds, and then dies out altogether; or attending school board meetings year after year until every child in town has what they need to succeed in school and no child starts the school day on an empty stomach.

And lest you wonder, as I sometimes do, if my little light matters that much, I would challenge you with the same questions with which Rev. Dr. J. Howard Olds once challenged me. He asks:

1. Can you name the five wealthiest people in the world?
2. Can you name the last five Heisman trophy winners?
3. Can you name the last five winners of American Idol or The Voice?

Some of you probably could, but most of us really don't know.

Now consider some additional questions:

1. What was the name of your 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher?
2. Who was there for you the first time your teenage heart was broken?
3. Who is the first friend you would call in an emergency?

You do know the answers to these questions. [from "This Little Light of Mine" by Dr. J. Howard Olds, www.sermons.com.] Jesus said to let your light shine. The people in our lives that touch us the most are the ones who have, in some way, been light before our very eyes. They're not stars. They're not heroes. They're not perfect. What makes them special is that you know they cared. You and I accept their gracious generosity, and we pay forward to another generation. We don't have to be stars, heroes, perfect. We just help dig through the manure for a while. We do what we can to make life a little brighter here and now. We are called and created to be the light of hope in a dark world.

And now we need to wrap this up. So let me tell you about a first grade teacher, who asked her class the question: "What do you do to help at home?" One by one the answers came back. One little girl said, "I dry the dishes." One little boy said, "I feed the dog." Another child said, "I sweep the floor." Everybody gave an answer – everybody except one little boy sitting in the back. He didn't say anything. The teacher looked at him and said, "Johnny, what do you do to help out at home?" And Johnny said, "I stay out of the way." [from "At Your Service Lord" by James Merritt, www.sermons.com.] Which broke my heart. Because all of us need to feel we have some significance, some purpose, some good. Folks, we're not stars, we're not heroes, we're not perfect. But we're not called or created to stay out of the way.

Jesus says that we are the light of the world. We are God's gift to this time and place, which is no cause for arrogance. Gifts are made to be used. Gifts are given to remind the receiver of the love of the one who gave it. You and I are God's gift to the world. To be light is to be Christ-like, other-

focused, hope-driven. Darkness is isolating. But light includes. Light must shine out. Its very nature is to be visible, public, spreading beyond our skin and our walls. This doesn't mean Jesus is suddenly justifying a pompous display of religious piety. It means that if the love of God lives within us, our very nature will be to engage in life-saving; light-sharing work. It will be what we do. But even more, it will be our very nature. You are the light the world. Live like it. Amen.

## YAHWEH by U2

Take these shoes clip clopping down some dead end street  
Take these shoes and make them fit  
Take this shirt—this polyester, white trash, made in nowhere  
Take this shirt and make it clean  
Take this soul, stranded in some skin and bones  
Take this soul and make it sing

Yahweh! Yahweh! Always pain before a child is born  
Yahweh! Yahweh! Still I'm waiting for the dawn

Take these hands—teach them what to carry  
Take these hands, don't make a fist, no  
Take this mouth, so quick to criticize  
Take this mouth, give it a kiss

Yahweh! Yahweh! Always pain before a child is born  
Yahweh! Yahweh! Still I'm waiting for the dawn

Still waiting for the dawn  
The sun is coming up  
The sun is coming up on the ocean  
This love is like a drop in the ocean

Yahweh! Yahweh! Always pain before a child is born  
Yahweh! Tell me now: why the dark before the dawn?

Take this city—a city should be shining on a hill  
Take this city—may it be your will  
What no man can own, no man can take  
Take this heart  
Take this heart  
Take this heart and make it break.

