

There are all kinds of theories about how to motivate people.

Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher Don Sutton hadn't won a game in eight weeks. A critical member of the press was suggesting that he be dropped from the starting rotation. The future looked bleak, and Sutton felt terrible. Then, before a game, Dodgers manager Walter Alston tapped him on the shoulder. *"I'd like to speak with you, Don,"* he said. Sutton prepared himself for the worst. *"Don," said Alston, "I know the past couple of months have NOT been good for you. Everyone's wondering whether we can make it to the play-offs . . . You know there is a lot of pressure . . . I've had to make a decision."* Sutton had visions of being taken off the mound. Then Alston continued. *"If the Dodgers are going to win this year,"* he said, looking Sutton in the eye, *"they're going to win with Don Sutton pitching. Come what may, you're staying in the starting job. That's all I wanted to say."* Sutton's losing streak lasted two more weeks, but because of his manager's encouragement he felt different about it. Something in him was turning around. He found himself pitching the best ball of his career. In the National League pennant drive, he won 13 games out of 14.

There are all kinds of theories about how to motivate people. We can do it through guilt, through fear, through shame.

BUT THESE WERE NOT JESUS' WAYS. Jesus motivated through positive messages of HOPE & ENCOURAGEMENT.

Consider our lesson for today. **Jesus says to his followers, "You are the light of the world. . . ."** Can you imagine that? Here was a motley crew of farmers and fishermen and tax collectors and housewives in a tiny and remote village in an obscure part of the world and Jesus was saying to them, *"You are the light of the world."* Talk about a statement of faith! Let's go farther than that. Talk about a crazy idea! Light of the world? That bunch? It must have sounded absurd at the time even to them. Only Jesus could have seen that through this motley crew God would indeed change the world forever. At the time, however, it probably sounded like so much idle chatter. *"You are the light of the world,"* he said and so they were. *Now do you want to hear something really absurd?* SO ARE WE!!

Jesus says to us this morning that WE are the light of the world. Think about that for a moment. Sink your teeth into that idea--that thought. **You and I are the light of the world--What does it mean?** Well, let me suggest some possibilities.

It means, #1... we have a responsibility for the world. That makes sense, doesn't it? We are the light of the world. A light house steers ships away from the rocks. A light bulb lights up a room. Light does not exist for its own glory but to brighten up the world. That is the first thing Jesus is saying to us: **We have a responsibility for the world.**

I read a story recently about a remarkable young man. He was a young man who had been left blind in both eyes by a childhood accident. In nineteenth-century France, when this young man lived, blind children had little help and few hopes. But then a kind priest, Father Jacques Palluy, took an interest in the lad. He was amazed at the boy's intelligence and eagerness to learn. With his parents' permission, Father Palluy enrolled the boy in the Royal Institute of Blind Youth in Paris.

Thrust into a new and frightening environment, the boy was lonely and depressed. In time, however, he found friendship and encouragement. Unfortunately, he was frustrated by the institute's lack of books in raised print. He also found the symbols in raised print confusing. So, he set out, at twelve years of age, to invent his own system. After three years he perfected the method, but he encountered indifference and hostility when he tried to convince the world that his system was better. Even with the support of the institute's director, he was told again and again that he was too young to have created a workable alphabet for the blind. Years passed. This young man grew older, was made a teacher at the institute, and became a fine organist, always hoping that his method would find acceptance. But his health was frail. It was not until he lay in bed, dying of tuberculosis, that he heard that the first steps were being taken to popularize his system. Though he did not live to witness it, Louis Braille's alphabet became the universal method of reading for the blind. **His courage and hunger for knowledge enabled him to triumph over disability and disease and open new worlds to future generations.**

Louis Braille became “THE LIGHT” for those whose physical eyes had failed them. How wonderful it is when a young person sets out to make the world a better place. Some of you can remember when the pulpits of this nation sounded with the call for young men and women to go out as missionaries to be light to a world of darkness. We don't sound that trumpet as we once did. We don't call people to really sacrifice all they have and all they are for the good of humanity,” –that is sad. **We are the light of the world. We have a responsibility for the world.**

We also have something that the world desperately needs--JESUS. **That is the second thing Jesus was saying when he said that we are the light of the world.** We have something the world cannot find anywhere else.

WHAT IS THAT THING?

Mother Teresa was speaking to persons who had come to meet her from all over the world. Among the groups to which she spoke was one of religious sisters from many North American orders. After her talk she asked if there were any questions. "Yes, I have one," a woman sitting near the front said. "As you know, most of the orders represented here have been losing members. It seems that more and more women are leaving all the time. **And yet your order is attracting thousands upon thousands.** What do you do?" Without hesitating Mother Teresa answered, "**I give them Jesus.**" "Yes I know," said the woman, "but take habits, for example. Do your women object to wearing habits? And the rules of the order, how do you do it?" "**I give them Jesus,**" Mother Teresa replied. "Yes, I know Mother," said the woman, "but can you be more specific?" "**I give them Jesus,**" Mother Teresa repeated again. "Mother," said the woman, "we are all of us aware of your fine work. I want to know about something else." Mother Teresa said quietly, "**I give them Jesus. There is nothing else.**"

What do we have the world can't find anywhere else? All we have is the person of Jesus Christ.

We are often reminded that we live in a pluralistic world. Today there are persons of many religious backgrounds who are calling our country their home. And we can learn many things from our new neighbors. If someone should ask you, though, **what is distinctive about Christianity,** let me suggest you do as Mother Teresa did...**GIVE THEM JESUS.** The greatest heresy current today is that all religions are the same. Certainly, all of the world's great religions have something worthwhile to offer. You can find help in all of them. But what you can't find is the story of the Prodigal Son, or the Good Samaritan or the Rich Fool. There is no higher order of life than that which Jesus taught. Christianity as an institution might not be too appealing at times, **but if you understand the life and teachings of Jesus, he has no peer. Literally.**

YES, we have a responsibility for the world. We also have something the world cannot find anywhere else—THE GREAT SHEPHERD WHO BRINGS COMFORT, WHO PROMISES FORGIVENESS AND ETERNAL LIFE.

This brings us to the THIRD THING, #3, to be said...

We are not the source of our light; BUT WE ARE HIS “REFLECTORS.” *There is One who has touched our lives and given us the power and the authority to touch others.* **SO, SHARE HIM WITH THOSE AROUND YOU.**

REFLECT HIM TO OTHERS!!

Once there was a teacher who also loved his students. He saw possibilities in them that no one else saw in them. He saw possibilities in them they did not see in themselves. **"You are the light of the world,"** he said to them.

And soon they became the LIGHT OF THE WORLD. The love they received from him they passed on to others. Today there is no place in this world that the light they received from him doesn't shine. Because of fierce persecution, it is sometimes only a faint flicker. Sometimes because of the weaknesses of his followers the fire is uncertain and tentative, but THAT LIGHT STILL GLOWS. And now it is in your possession and mine. **We are the light of the world.**

Years ago, three young men decided to hop a slow-moving freight train on the south end of a town in the Pacific Northwest. It was supposed to be a lark on a spring evening. The train was barely moving. As the three friends rode down the rails, the locomotive poured on the coals and really picked up speed. Before these friends knew it, they were doing about forty miles per hour. They had left the city. Darkness was setting in out in the boondocks. Soon these three friends were cold, lost, and scared.

After half an hour or so, they decided that they had to do something. So in perfect Butch Cassidy fashion, they lined up in the door of the boxcar in which they were riding and they bailed out. It was a rough tumble down but they were okay. **The problem was, they were terribly lost. It was pitch dark.**

Eventually, one of them looked off in the distance and saw a faint glow. It looked like there was a small town out there. The three humiliated joyriders began walking through the woods. With each STEP they traveled, the light became brighter and more distinct. **There was a town out there!** Soon the light became intense enough to illuminate their path. **They wound up at a roadside restaurant and called for help.**

These friends got home safely because they saw a distant light and walked in its glow. It became an overwhelming beacon that led them to where they needed to go.

I don't believe that I am being overly dramatic when I say there are people in this world who are lost in darkness and they are looking for a "light," "any light" to lead them to spiritual, emotional, and mental safety.

How about your light? Is it shining? Could they find their way home because of you? You and I are the light of the world. We have a responsibility for the world. We have what the world desperately needs.

We are not the source of the light THEY MIGHT NEED, but we are "REFLECTORS," reflectors of the true light, the LIGHT of Jesus Christ.

We live in a time when Jesus' light is needed more than ever.

MAY WE PRAY THAT GOD HELPS US TO SHINE BRIGHTLY, SO MORE CAN SEE THEIR WAY OUT OF THEIR DARKNESS into the "TRUE LIGHT," the "LIGHT OF CHRIST." Amen.