

*Radiant and Intermingled*  
Oxford Institute, August 19, 2007

*This is the great reason why the providence of God has so mingled you together with others that whatever grace you have received of God may through you be communicated to others, that every holy temper and word and work of yours may have influence on them also. By this means a check will, in some measure, be given to the corruption which is in the world, and a small part, at least, saved from the general infection, and rendered holy and pure before God*

*- Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse IV*

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. 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 Father in heaven.

- Matthew 5:12-14

The text for today is a strong image, first and last and continual in scripture: Light! Let there be light! Arise, shine! I give you as light to the nations. The Lord is my light and my salvation. Epiphany light. I am the light of the world. Resurrection light. Ascension light. Dazzling light blinding Saul on the road to Damascus. Walk in the light. Eschatological light: In holy city of Jerusalem, there will be no need of lamp. God will be our light.

It is God who created us in love, who beckons us, who welcomes us, who sanctifies us, who gives us growth in holiness, who envelops us into eternity. We move in this service toward renewal of covenant, remembering that the covenant in which we live begins, continues and ends in God.

Father Wesley describes God's loving power in the sermon - *Brightness of God's glory, gleaming forth fountain of beauty and love, original source of all excellency and perfection. . .*

Yet God in graciousness says to us: You are light, the light of the world.

It is challenging to live as luminous people. When our daughter was a child, I would seek her help in my preparation for children's stories in worship. I asked her one Saturday afternoon to listen to what I had prepared. She did so, patiently. Then she returned to her book. I pressed. I should not have. "What do you think?" She lowered her book and said simply, "Mom, it's Saturday, it's five o'clock, and it's all you've got."

"This Little Light of Mine" is a favorite childhood song of many in the United States. Upon moving to Mississippi, I discovered "This Little Light of Mine" to be, not a children's song but a powerful freedom song. A song of witness, of struggle, of

prophetic witness. Fannie Lou Hamer sang this song, leading others to sing it, on a bus in the Delta of Mississippi, after registering to vote and just before being beaten in the Winona jail. She bore the scars of the beating for the rest of her life. We sing this song now, often. Shine, shine, shine, I'm going to let it shine!

This is simple, powerful truth for us. This week we have used, in English, many long words, with 5 and 6 syllables. This gracious, powerful word of our Lord Jesus Christ is simple, direct, profound. Seven one-syllable words: You are the light of the world, luminous, intermingled.

Mr. Wesley asked, then answered the question:

*Why be clogged, loaded with doing and suffering? Why not be taken up in high and lofty contemplation*

*Your holiness makes you as conspicuous as the sun in the midst of heaven. You cannot stay in the world without appearing to all humankind.*

*Love cannot be hid any more than light. Try to hide a Christian. You are like a city on a hill*

This is the positioning of the church: on a lampstand, on a hill, visible to all!

I first met Alex when he was a toddler, applesauce on his face. He grew up in our church, a very energetic and challenging presence. In the nativity scene, in the Easter cantata, in Sunday school, in worship, in children's mission projects, he was always present. Always creating havoc. Those volunteering to teach Sunday school would scatter above and below his grade level, leaving his class needing leadership. His energy was a great challenge.

When he was 10 years old, he asked to ride with me to a wedding reception. In the front seat, he chattered as always, "I am making money this summer, can I work at the church, can I cut your grass, can I pull weeds. I want to make a lot of money." "What will you do with all this money?" I asked. He thoughtfully answered, "I don't know, but I have made \$50 so far and put the first \$5 in the offering plate."

If you had asked, who will our next tither be? In my wildest imagination I would not have guessed Alex.

Father Wesley exhorted in his sermon, "Shine!" Whether your witness seems effective, you are saved through it. God changes hearts through you. God, through your prayers, builds up. Who are you not to shine? Are you judging some to be swine, unworthy of light? Judge not! Shine! Faith cannot live without being conversant. Shine, intermingled!

The newest Methodist Church in Mississippi is in the poorest area of the poorest city in the poorest region of the poorest state in the United States. Two clergy appointed to begin this ministry rode together through the desolate poverty. One said, "Step on the gas." The other said, "Stop the car." They stopped the car. 75 people came to the first gathering around simple food on a grill. 200 young people came for a youth gathering. The Good Samaritan Clinic has been founded to offer health care in the community. Hope Ministries, it is called. Light in darkness, brilliant, powerful, warm, radiant.

The architecture of this place, Wesley Memorial Church, is a lovely reminder of field preaching, people all around, hearing, being drawn toward God.

It is hurricane season in MS. One year, 11 months, three weeks and three days ago, this time of day, 10:30 a.m., Hurricane Katrina roared toward Mississippi. Methodist leaders arrived just at the time of the first gathering of interfaith and community leaders to organize the response. There was an audible sigh of relief at the entrance of Methodists and someone said, "Thank God you are here. We can't do this without the Methodists."

Jim Collins in his recent monograph for non-profit organizations poses markers for organizational influence in the community. One marker is recognition, recognition of those around. Do our communities watch for our presence? Long for our presence? Ask for our presence? Are they drawn to Christ through us? Might they be? May our light increase - radiant, intermingled. May our confidence increase, may our souls shine, may our witness be used of God to draw all to the cross of Christ.

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May through you be communicated to others,  
That every holy temper and word and work of yours  
May have influence on them also.  
By this means a check will, in some measure,  
Be given to the corruption which is in the world,  
And a small part, at least, saved from the general infection,  
And rendered holy and pure before God*

One great reason, one great desire of God, one great aim of our shared life. Shine!