

SHARE THE LIGHT

“Here’s another way to put it: You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don’t think I’m going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I’m putting you on a light stand. Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous [Parent] in heaven.”

Matthew 5:14 [The Message]

BACKGROUND

On Easter Sunday in 1949, on nation-wide radio, Christians were challenged to donate one million dollars in one hour to help people devastated by the aftermath of World War II. Faithful Christians answered the challenge and the goal was met.

That was the beginning of the One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) offering. This year marks the 75th Anniversary of its inception. Our world has changed since 1949, but human needs remain. OGHS continues to carry God’s message of love and hope to people in crisis.

Since that first offering, OGHS has expanded its mission to support domestic and international development, fight poverty and its consequences, bring aid and relief to communities torn by war or ravaged by national disaster, advocate and offer resettlement assistance for refugees and displaced persons, and combat injustice in its many forms. OGHS provides funding and hands-on assistance in collaboration with local and international partners.

Each year, the Offering is gathered by several denominations and Church World Service (CWS) under a single theme developed by the ecumenical OGHS Committee. In addition to posters, brochures, and interactive media, the Committee commissions a “Planning and Resource Guide” that contains a variety of resources and activities for pastors and church leaders to use as they promote and receive the offering.

One Great
HOUR
OF SHARING



Thank you for supporting One Great Hour of Sharing for 75 years.
You continue to share light in places that need it.

Theme Development and Scriptural Exegesis: Share the Light

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine...
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine...[1]

If Jesus had a playlist of music, surely this familiar hymn would be among the top five; at least, Matthew's Jesus would rank it high. Matthew opens the Gospel by placing Jesus squarely within the story of God's ongoing relationship to and intention for humanity—people called into God's own household, as sons and daughters, grounded in loving connection to each other and creation. God invites all of humanity into God's house, regardless of nationality, tribal affiliation, social status, or gender.

As the fulfillment of Israel's hopes and purposes, Jesus calls men and women to follow him—and they do. He names them disciples—and they are. He outlines their responsibilities—and they respond. Their lives are transformed and they begin living from the inside out—less for themselves and more for others. Jesus teaches that faith calls for action—as a response to the God who loves them unconditionally. They are now co-creators with God to bring peace, harmony, unity, compassion, care, love—shalom—right now.

Discipleship is like the kaleidoscope—an optical tube containing loose bits of colored material between two plates and two mirrors; when turned, the bits of material are reflected in an endless variety of patterns.[2]

Cozy Baker, kaleidoscope enthusiast and founder of the Brewster Society[3], says:

To me kaleidoscopes are divine inspiration; they resonate to the music in my soul and the imagery is exactly what my heart yearns to see. I view the kaleidoscope's image as a warm embrace - one more colorful expression of God's love toward all creation.[4]

Sharing our light, as the diverse and colorful expression of God's love here on earth, leads to making blankets, staffing food pantries, cooking meals, building houses and schools, signing petitions for worthy causes, and protesting injustices.

We also share the light through our contributions to One Great Hour of Sharing [OGHS]—supporting our siblings around the world after natural disasters; providing care and safety in places where war rages and poverty prevails; sharing techniques for sustainable agriculture, energy efficiency, and clean water; and advocating for the dignity of those who are marginalized.

Each of our playlists should include the song, “This Little Light of Mine.” A simple song with a simple message—let your light shine, share in the kaleidoscope of care and love. Your light is on a light stand, for all to see—shine and share. On any given day, in any given place, in the midst of any given situation, light is shining because we are there through our gifts to OGHS. Your contributions make a difference. Your dollars count. Give generously. Share the light.

*You're here to be
light, bringing out
the God-colors
in the world.*

Matthew 5:14-15 (The Message)

*“This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it
shine...Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine...”*

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Jesus teaches that faith calls for action. Sharing our light, as the diverse and colorful expression of God's love here on earth, leads to making blankets, staffing food pantries, cooking meals, building houses and schools, signing petitions for worthy causes, and protesting injustices. A simple song with a simple message—our light is on a light stand, for all to see—shine and share. On any given day, light is shining because we are there through our gifts to OGHS.

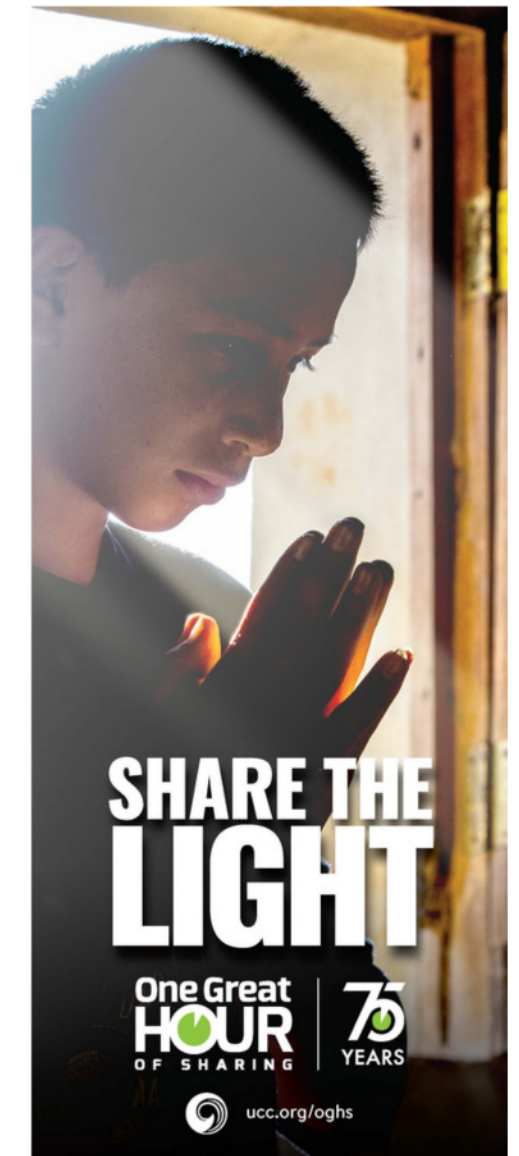
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Your dollars count. Give generously.

Share the light.



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[1] Lift Every Voice and Sing II: An African American Hymnal (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 1993), #221.

[2] <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/kaleidoscope>

[3] Named for the inventor of the kaleidoscope, David Brewster

[4] Cozy Baker, News Scope, spring, 2004; Cozy Baker - Brewster Kaleidoscope Society (brewstersociety.com).

SCRIPTURE COMMENTARY AND SERMON STARTER

An old adage declares, “If you know better, you do better.” In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches his disciples and the gathered crowd what it means to be children of God.

By starting his discourse with the Beatitudes, Jesus declares that humanity was not living out God’s intention for them. Jesus is struck by their conditions and circumstances of fear, anxiety, isolation, apathy, division, despair, oppression, injustice, and chaos. Jesus recognizes that throughout the land, there is a need for grace, mercy, justice, and compassion. They need light, direction, and guidance. Jesus makes a startling admission—God is transforming the land, right now, right here. Through Jesus, God lights a path forward toward shalom—total well-being. God’s grace is moving across the land, creating a ginormous household of diverse people who are children of God and siblings to one another.

Jesus also sets the bar for discipleship. The disciples are to live out their faith and commitment to God through concrete acts of service for others. They have been transformed from individuals into family, living for others. Jesus says the disciples are light and as such, they are to shine, to share the light with others. Not to brag on themselves or bolster their egos—they engage in active service as a response to the gracious God who has gifted them with so much. Their acts reflect back to the Source of all there is—God! Jesus’ message was for the Twelve, for the crowds gathered around them, and also for us! We are invited to join God’s grand movement of transformation.

The world is as broken now as it was in Jesus’ day. People are suffering, systems are failing the most vulnerable among us, safety nets are diminishing in number and effectiveness, needs are increasing. It can be so easy to get caught up in our own lives that we forget that our simple acts of illuminating the world around us with our love, compassion, and acts of service—however small it may seem to us—can make a difference. We know better and we do better.

As you prepare to preach and teach for the OGHS offering, consider these questions: what does sharing light look like in and for your congregation, your community, and in the world? How is God using you to share light? How has someone shared light for you?

As a congregational challenge, ask members to start a Share the Light journal—write down instances where they see someone sharing light or when they have shared light. These can be posted on the church’s social media platforms or in the newsletter. Light is shining everywhere if we take the time to notice.

Remind your congregation that we share our light whenever we offer an encouraging word, bake a casserole for a friend who is ill, tutor a child in an after-school program, staff a soup kitchen, volunteer to teach Sunday School, or advocate and support efforts to right an injustice.

We share our light when we contribute to the OGHS offering. Your gifts help families live more efficiently or to find safety in shelters instead of on the streets. Your gifts allow women to sell locally sourced produce and other food items to support their families. Your gifts allow women to create cooperatives so that they can do more together than they could do separately. Your gifts support places of hospitality to strangers who soon become friends. Your gifts support people recovering from trauma and much more.

We cannot be in all of the places that need help and we may never personally witness the results of our help, but through our generous tithes, offerings, and special gifts, we can illumine places with abundant God-colors and know that we have made a difference.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reminds us that we are the light of the world. We share that light when we do good for others. Discipleship from the inside out begins with generosity.

When the opportunity comes, let us shine and share.
When another is in need, let us respond.
Let’s go public, for we are Light-bearers.
Generosity is our standard and Love is our ethic.

Let us not hide our light under a bucket—let our light shine for all to see. Let us share the light.

Rev. Barbara J. Essex

SHARE THE LIGHT

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Share the light

All: like a city on a hill.

Shine the light

for the world to see.

Be the light

so that our neighbors can find their way.

You are the light

and it will not be extinguished.

Do not hide your light.

We will share the light.

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Your first word of creation, O God, was “Let there be light” and there was. Jesus came as the light of the world and then called us to become light-bearers in our lives. As we come to worship on this special day called One Great Hour of Sharing, may we shine our light here in this place as well as in the world to which you have called us to live. It can be so easy to get so caught up in our own lives that we forget the simple act of illuminating the world around us with our love, compassion, acts of service, justice and advocacy and kind words to others. Show us the paths where we might follow in the footsteps of Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

LITANY OR RESPONSIVE READING

One: “This little light of mine,

All: I’m gonna let it shine.”

“Hide it under a bushel?”

“No! I’m gonna let it shine.”

“You are the light of the world.”

“A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.”

When the opportunity comes,

I will shine.

When another is in need,

I will respond.

Let’s go public.

Light-bearers we are.

Generosity is our standard.

Love is our ethic.

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

“May we be a shining light to the nations
A shining light to the peoples of the earth
Till the whole world sees the glory of Your name.
May Your pure light shine through us.”

These lyrics were written by Chris Christensen, the son of a missionary, who lived on three continents before he entered college. After college, he went back and forth between Africa, Europe and North America. While in the US in the early 1980s on his way to a conference, he penned his “Song for the Nations.”

Like many of us, Christensen would have seen many of the places where the One Great Hour of Sharing offering goes. Through the graciousness of generous people from around the world, the light of Christ shines through us as the hungry are fed, the unhoused find shelter and people are empowered to do more than they could have imagined. The light shines.

At this table, we share in the fellowship of one another and with Christ. We are filled again, so that we might go out and share with others. At the table, we hear Christ saying to us, “Share.” Share the food. Share the bounty. Share the light. Share with the nations, the peoples, the world. Come, now, as Christ shares the best with us.

COMMUNION PRAYER

From the beginning of creation, God, you have brought forth light into the world. Your first act of creation was, “Let there be light,” and there was light. In every way since that time, you have shared generous gifts with us and yet we did not always receive them.

We left the lush garden to toil in the world. We rebelled against your love and became greedy with the gifts you gave us. During the exodus, you sent manna and we wanted more. You called forth water from a rock and we still complained. You sent leaders, kings, judges, and prophets. All of them shared ways for us to be in relationship with you and each other and we ignored them. We chose our own path.

Eventually you sent Jesus, who called himself the light of the world and called us to join him in sharing the light with all we encounter. After his death and resurrection, you sent the Spirit to illuminate our lives so that we could continue to bear the light of Christ into the world for ages to come.

Sharing that light still today, we boldly proclaim this truth which we believe, live and proclaim:

Continue with the Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy) and the Great Thanksgiving as your tradition practices.

INVITATION TO OFFERING

“Rain-diamonds, this winter morning, embellish the tangle of unpruned pear-tree twigs; each solitaire, placed, it appears, with considered judgement, bears the light beneath the rifted clouds – the indivisible shared out in endless abundance.”

English poet Denise Levertov reminds us that light is shared in endless abundance. Today, through our special offering to One Great Hour of Sharing, we have the opportunity to share light in endless abundance in places near and far.

Our gifts help families find safety in shelters instead of on the streets. Our gifts allow women to sell locally sourced produce and other food items to support their families. Our gifts allow other women to create cooperatives so that they can do more together than they could do separately. Our gifts support those who are recovering from trauma.

We cannot be in all of these places ourselves or even see them with our own eyes, but through our generous tithes, offerings, and special gifts, we can share abundant light. In that spirit, let us share now!

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

Generous God, we offer these gifts in the spirit of light and with a heart full of gratitude for what we’ve been given. These offerings are one way of showing our commitment to sharing with those who are in need, neighbors near and far, whom we are unlikely to meet. Let us not hide our light under a bucket but shine it for all to see. Bless the gifts, just as you have blessed us, with an extra measure of your grace. In Christ’s name, Amen.

CHARGE & BENEDICTION

(Encourage those in your congregations to shine the lights on their cell phones during the benediction.)

One: You are the people called into God’s own household.

All: We are children of light, living together,

Grounded in loving connection to each other and all creation.

We are co-creators with God,

Bringing peace, harmony, unity, compassion, care, love—shalom—right now.

We leave to share the light and love of Christ everywhere we go.