

## WELCOME 28<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2024 – 4<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY '24 B

1 John 1:1-10 & Matthew 5:14-16

**Welcome!** It's great to be together again today! Along with your worship order you have in your hands **Growing Praise** inserts & **Bible Study Qs** that are able to lead you deeper into God's word/work in your life, & help you share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom** Bible Study Catch-ups on Friday @ 1p.m. Those will recommence this week...2<sup>nd</sup> February...

**As we move into this week...** Vibrant: Full of energy & life. Pulsating. Bright. Intense. Saturated with colour. That's God's desire for his Church...We are the light of the world:

We are called to live & be a vibrant community of life & joy. We're called to share deep relationships that pulse to the beat of Jesus' heart. We're called to grow in vibrant discipleship that is saturated in God's word & leads to significant impact, life-changing purpose & eternal connection.

God chooses his church to bear his hope to the world. In every time & place God calls his people to something greater than they currently experience so that in Christ's power His people are propelled forward into His mission under His mighty hand. If we fail to understand Christ's vision for his church we falter in our mission to carry the good news of Jesus to the people around us.

As a church we say it like this:

**God** has called Living Water Fellowship to be a vibrant Christian community that glorifies God by inviting all people to become disciples of Jesus who grow in his grace and go in his power to show his love to the world.

**"You** are the light of the world — like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden."

We'll explore, experience, & live that together today...

*Let's pray...*

## PRAYER OF THE DAY

Un-stop our ears, O God, that we may hear your Word fresh in this moment. Open our minds & hearts to be changed by your power. Free us from the unclean spirits of worry, fear, habit & pride. Teach us, Lord, that we may follow you more faithfully & grow more like you each day. In the name of your beloved Son Jesus we pray. Amen.

*Let's hear God's word...*

## **FAITH CHAT:**

1. What do you think makes a vibrant community?
2. How would someone see the light of Jesus in you?

If the gospel is to challenge the public life of our society...it will only be by movements that begin with the local congregation in which the reality of the new creation is present, known, and experienced, and from which men and women go into every sector of public life to claim it for Christ, to unmask the illusions which have remained hidden and to expose all areas of public life to the light of the gospel. – Lesslie Newbigin

#### 4<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY '24 B – VIBRANT LIVING: VIBRANT COMMUNITY

I had to have a stern conversation w/ one of Charis' teachers back when she was in yr 10 or so... There had been a classroom discussion & some issue of Xn faith was raised for Charis & after class that teacher & another had a chat w/ her & told her, "The whole class knows you're a Christian. You don't have to make a big deal about it. In fact it would help if you tone it down some." Imagine...telling someone named "Guilfoyle" to "tone it down." During **our** conversation, she went so far as to say Charis should "park her faith at the kerb" <sup>b/4</sup> school each morning...you can guess my reaction to **THAT**...

I was thinking about that again in the midst of the latest "Australia Day" flare **up**. We've been confronted again w/ the suggestion that we need to "tone down" & "park at the kerb" our enthusiasm for all things Western Christendom has brought to the world: Rule of law, voting rights, electricity, clean accessible water, flush toilets, medicine, food in abundance...freedoms unparalleled...& yes some of the horrible things humans do to one another, but that's not unique to Western Christendom colonies...I could tell you about Incans, Aztecs & Mayans & H's Viking forebears but that would ruin your lunch for a week.

But because **WE** take Jesus seriously... "**You** are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp & then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds (your light) shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father."...that description of us as his followers – HIS CHURCH – cannot be "toned down." **NB**: It is a description **NOT** a command.

2X here in Mt 5 vss 13 & 14 Jesus uses *DE*scriptive language for his followers (HIS CHURCH) "**You** are the salt of the earth...**You** are the light of the world..." In his Sermon on the Mount Jesus describes the nature & character of HIS CHURCH blessed by the Father as folks who are different from the world around them...in thought, attitude, action, values, & behaviour...In the very stuff of life HIS CHURCH sticks out - stands out as visible signposts...human lighthouses different & distinct in this world. It isn't a command to go do something off the wall or outrageous...Pr Tod Bolsinger says: **Being** salt & light is not so much about how we become more salty & shine more brightly, but how we respond to Jesus' call to be the people of God who in our distinctively Kingdom-focused living — **ARE** light to the world. The church of Jesus Christ (**THAT'S US**) exist to reveal the presence, purpose & character of God in this world...to be made new in Christ as his resurrection makes all things new forever...to be daily transformed until we more closely resemble Jesus in our thoughts, attitudes, actions, values, & behaviour...the very stuff of life. To reveal the presence, purpose & character of God in this world that often denies his existence & defies his intentions...

"**You** **ARE** the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden." we simply are

Jesus reminds those seated around him on the hillside & seated right here: **WE ALONE** are in on the secret of God's reign/rule/kingdom which claimed our world in Jesus. We know what the rest of the world doesn't: God chooses to love not hate us – save not condemn us – to be for not against us – to live with & in & among us not apart from us - to suffer for the world's sake not to cause the world to suffer for his (every other faith expression in the world says I have to suffer, do something or sacrifice for god) Jesus said the sign of God's kingdom was the triumph of his grace † "*The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve & to give his life as a ransom...*" -Mt 20:28 God in our flesh crucified buried risen & living in, among, & through us is the sign of God's triumphant grace & rule of love.

There are no instructions on how to become salt & light. Jesus doesn't even say that we're "little lights" & should practice shining & work hard to grow into "big lights." Rather, he declares in him we are the light of the world. It is sheer promise – absolute gift – unrestrained commendation/commission...not command! Means what?

**How** many of you regularly take in the news? Whatever source. Are you attentive to stuff going on in the world? **How** do you feel about that? See...hear...read news. How do you feel? It's 2024 & there is all over the joint a pervasive sense of dis-ease & division that affects us all. We all feel it. We all sense it. We all react to it at some level. We may not say "the world's going to hell in a bucket," but I have...Xns & not-yet-Xns... those conversations...a sense of decline...wasting away & wasting of lives people resources...confusion disorder untethered aimless drifting...there's "rot" in contemporary culture...*Amen?*

Do you know what'll make a difference to that? Legislation? Protest? Hide? Fight? "**You** are the light of the world — like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden." The brakes on the trolley headed toward destruction is you/me/us. **CHRIST'S CHURCH**. **ANYTIME** we live the values attitudes behaviours of God's kingdom of grace we push back the wasting away & rot of life on this earth. When we live forgiveness, courage, hope, peace, compassion & joy we push back the decay so renewal & refreshing can break through. If we embrace values & behaviours that are indistinguishable from the world...if our ethics & morals & aims & ambitions look more like the world around us than they do like Jesus...decay advances/rot spreads. When you affirm/encourage ...tell the truth in the face of a lie...visit, ring, pray for someone who's struggling ...refuse to bless what God says is not of him...reject fear & despair & proclaim hope in God's sovereignty over even disaster & chaos...(Newbigin quote in svc order)

Jesus said so "**let** your **good** deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father." Hang on...we so think of good as a quality over against bad. We think Jesus means "Now children be good." Better translation of that..."**let** your

**beautiful** deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.”  
BEAUTIFUL...when your thoughts, attitudes, values, & behaviour reflect Christ’s truth & love & grace & compassion & hope & joy against the backdrop of this world’s darkness & violence & decay & death & ugliness anything you do will look BEAUTIFUL. What did I tell the kids earlier? Don’t need a flashlight on a 40° day. But when it’s dark & you need to go to the toilet w/o falling over the bedside table... when you can’t clearly see the way ahead...when the path you need to take is scary or treacherous...The place the *light of the world* matters most is a world that *loves darkness more than light* because it has surrendered itself over to evil...lifestyles attitudes aspirations ambitions dreams & decisions that end in death. The place the *light of the world* matters most is a world that rushes headlong toward death.

Luther SERMONS ON 1<sup>st</sup> PETER, 1523, WA 12:267.3-7, 318.25-319.6 *We live on earth only so that we should be of help to other people. Otherwise, it would be best if God would strangle us & let us die as soon as we are baptised & have begun to believe. For this reason, however, he lets us live that we may bring other people also to faith as he has done for us.* Do you see the world around you decaying? You have the Spirit’s power to stop the rot. Do you experience the world as dark & threatening? The light of Christ in you can push back the darkness & fear to reveal the beauty of a grace-filled life. **“One** word of truth outweighs the whole world.” - Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn One word of Christ can bring life & light, hope & salvation, restoration & healing. (STEPHANIE RICE) And that word of Christ...

**We** proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard & seen. We saw him with our own eyes & touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life. – John reassures us the light life power & love that is stronger than death is **real**... JESUS IS REAL...Jesus is no myth. The gospel is no legend fairy-tale or wishful thinking. God came here in Jesus for us to make our lives just as real & just as powerful by his Spirit in us...to make us his forever. Do you see the world around you decaying? You have the Spirit’s power to stop the rot...to offer life instead of death.

*If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves & not living in the **truth**.* Truthfully there are no excuses for **sin**. WE’RE ACCOUNTABLE for our lives & our lies, deception, self-indulgent self-aggrandizing...say *this* but do *that* living...fearing the problems w/o offering Christ as the solution. We can’t hide from the truth: we’re as tainted, twisted & distorted by sin as any & it’s a debt we can’t settle. **But** *if we confess our sin, God is faithful & just to forgive us our sin & to cleanse us from all unrighteousness* God chooses to love not hate us – save not condemn us – to be for not against us – to live with in & among us not apart from us - to suffer for the world’s sake not to cause the world to suffer for his. The very nature **of** GOD IS GRACE LOVE, & MERCY...redemption hope

forgiveness healing restoration joy are his to give & the Father gives...freely abundantly eternally...to all who receive/believe.

We are called to live & be a vibrant community of life & joy. We’re called to share deep relationships that pulse to the beat of Jesus’ heart. We’re called to grow in vibrant discipleship that is saturated in God’s word & leads to significant impact, life-changing purpose & eternal connection. God chooses his church to bear his hope to the world. That hope...should never be parked at the kerb, toned down or hidden ... because...**(verse at the top...TAKE IT HOME AND PRAYER follow on same slide)**

**“You** are the light of the world — like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden.”

### **TAKE IT HOME**

Where will the light of Christ shine from you this week into the life & experience of someone else?

*Let’s pray...* **(on screen to pray together)**

**Lord Jesus, this week let my life shine with your light for the people I meet. Use my life to bless them & impact their life in your Name. Make me beautiful in all I do so the world gives glory to the Father... Make Living Water a vibrant Christian community that glorifies God by inviting all people to become your disciples. We pray in your name...Amen.**