“***Let Your Light Shine***” by S. Finlan, at The First Church, Feb. 9, 2019

**Isaiah 58:2–8**

2 Day after day they seek me . . . They ask of me, 3 “Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?”

Look, you serve your own interest on your fast-day, and oppress all your workers.   
4 You fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. . .

6 Is not *this* the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? 7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

8 Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rearguard.

**Matthew 5:13–17, 20**

13“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 underfoot.

14“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden.15No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16In 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.

17“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. . . .

20“I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

There’s a lot to react to, here. I’m going to take the hardest part first: Jesus’ remark that he came not to abolish the law or the prophets, but to fulfill. If he did not come to abolish the Law, why is he so loose about some of its commands, like the Sabbath rules? Why does he reject the purity and the kosher rules, saying that impurity does not come from foods, and that all foods are clean (Mark 7:18–19)? Why is he so open to Gentiles, conversing with Greeks and Syrians, visiting Tyre and Sidon (John 12:20–25; Matt 15:21; Mark 7:24–31), without ever worrying about Gentile impurity? He shatters nationalist and gender boundaries, and affirms the spiritual value of each person, including children, which was possibly the *most* radical thing he did.

Jesus introduced change. The old priest-run, temple-dominated, and nationalistic religion is completely absent from his teachings. Instead he teaches immediate access to God for all the pure of heart, men, women, children, and even Gentiles. In fact, he says the temple should be open to Gentiles (Mark 11:17). One reason he met so much resistance is that it is hard for people to change, and especially hard for powerful people to let others have power. The religious authorities were hyper-vigilant and suspicious of Jesus right from the start. Change can also be hard for ordinary people, but Jesus helped to smooth that road for many people through his approachability and his consideration for the individual.

So what about his comment on the law? We need to recognize that he is putting the emphasis on his *fulfilling* it*.* He is not going to preserve every jot and stroke of the law, but rather fulfill the *purpose* and the *spirit* of the law and prophets. He’s all about having real, *spiritual* righteousness, not technical or ritual correctness. His disciples need to exceed the Pharisees, not in purity or in biblical learning, but in spiritual goodness. In fact, I doubt that many of the apostles really exceeded the Pharisees in biblical knowledge. But they knew the Bible well enough, and with Jesus’ help, were able to discern the values that matter the most: truth and goodness.

Jesus’ actions focus on love, mercy, and goodness. The kingdom of heaven is not interested in any kind of nit-picky ritual correctness, or clockwork repetition of prayers or blessings. The goodness and truth on which Jesus focuses can be called “light,” and it is the light of our character that needs to shine so that others will see it. Put it on a lampstand, so that it may be seen. This does not refer to showing off, but to being open and public. People will be drawn to your light, so don’t hide it under a bushel. Speak out for the truth, stand up for goodness, draw out the beauty that you see, or dance it out if you’re a dancer. Draw your picture. Sing your song. Write your book. Assemble your hospitality packages for the homeless. Buy a Christmas present for a local child. Smile on your co-worker. Look them in the eye and really *see* them. Shine where you are.

You are the salt of the earth. You are the spice that flavors the human race. You are a desirable part of the human mixture. Showing forth your light may be your way of fulfilling the law and prophets, loosing the bonds of injustice and letting the oppressed go free (Isa 58:6). Isaiah, too, wants real goodness, not the *apparent* goodness of fasting, which can be a form of showing off. Let “your light break forth like the dawn,” he says, and he promises that “your healing shall spring up quickly” (58:8).

We are not holding up our light as a point of pride, as a way to feel superior to others. But neither are we to be timid and ashamed, covering up our light. We are to let our light shine *naturally*, and *that* is how it reaches its peak luminosity. Jesus says that others will *see* your light—your good works—and will give glory to the Father (Matt 5:16). They will be drawn to you, because they will see truth and beauty there.

We all have an effect on the world, that is, the *people*, around us. We all shine light around us, or else we dampen the light that is there. As one of my favorite books says, “Understand how delicate are the influences emanating from you. . . Destinies are controlled by the delicacy of your calmness within. . . Come where the eternal Spirit, Love itself, untangles and pulls away from you all that binds” (*Letters of the Scattered Brotherhood*, 126–27 in the hardback, 154–55 in paperback). Have you ever felt yourself tangled up? The Spirit can untangle you.

And again, “Every individual has, within himself, a great part to play, and let no one think he is too small, too insignificant. The power of the kingdom of heaven [will] pour through [you] as a channel” (*Letters*, 142 in hardback, 173 in paperback). You are a channel for divine light. You are a glass through which that light can shine. Remember to always practice the teachings. Even if something in the world is making you angry, keep your spiritual focus and *make* it your mission to let God’s light shine through you.

Do small things with kindness. Do *great* things with humility.