

The Green Hill Presbyterian Church
February 8, 2026 – Table Copy

SILENT PREPARATION

Here, may the faithful find salvation and the careless be awakened. Here, may the doubting find faith, and the anxious be encouraged. Here, may the tempted find help, and the sorrowful comfort. Here, may the weary find rest, and the strong be renewed. Here, may the aged find consolation, and the young be inspired. Amen.

PRAYER OF INVOCATION (*Unison*)

Holy God, may our voices rise like trumpets to greet you. May our ears be attuned to know your ways. May our hearts be steady, focused on you. Guide us, we pray, in this time of worship. Touch us at the points of our greatest need. Stir us amidst our entrenched complacency. Make us strong to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free. Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and we will experience the joy of your healing care; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Great God of mystery and judgment – who has made us to be salt and light –
in a tasteless, shadowed world: Speak to us now through your Word.
Grant to us such understanding of the conditions around us, and such spiritual
discernment of the conditions within us, that others may see your good
works through us, give you the glory, and be moved to serve you;
for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FIRST READING:

Psalm 112:1-10

In this psalm, the light of God's righteous people shines in the darkness....

Praise the LORD! Happy are those who fear the LORD, who greatly delight in his commandments.

Their descendants will be mighty in the land;
the generation of the upright will be blessed.

Wealth and riches are in their houses, and their righteousness endures forever.

They rise in the darkness as a light for the upright;
they are gracious, merciful, and righteous.

It is well with those who deal generously and lend,
who conduct their affairs with justice.

For the righteous will never be moved;
they will be remembered forever.

They are not afraid of evil tidings; their hearts are firm, secure in the LORD.
Their hearts are steady; they will not be afraid;
in the end they will look in triumph on their foes.
They have distributed freely; they have given to the poor;
their righteousness endures forever; their horn is exalted in honor.
The wicked see it and are angry; they gnash their teeth and melt away;
the desire of the wicked comes to nothing.

SECOND READING: Matthew 5:13-20

*In our reading from Matthew's Gospel, Jesus continues his teaching
in what we know as "the Sermon on the Mount..."*

"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 under foot.

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid.
People do not light a lamp and put it under the bushel basket;
rather, they put it on the 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.

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law, or the Prophets;
I have come not to abolish, but to fulfill.

For – truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away,
not one letter, not one stroke of a letter,
will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments –
and teaches others to do the same –
will be called least in the kingdom of heaven,
but whoever does them – and teaches them –
will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

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

SERMON

“Lit for the Long Run”

It was one of the most memorable sights in the history of the **Olympics**:
Muhammad Ali – already struggling with **Parkinson’s** disease –
lighting the **Olympic torch** in **Atlanta**, back in **1996**.

The world held its breath as he stood there – trembling, but determined –
holding the torch high.

It was a moment of vulnerability and strength, of courage and inspiration.

And **Ali’s flame** lit more than a cauldron; it lit the hearts of millions.

Ali — who in **1960** was known as **Cassius Clay** –
and who had won a gold medal in boxing at the **Rome Olympics** –
at **age 18** —
now had a body – that was broken –
but still possessed a spirit –
a spirit that burned as bright as the flame that lit the torch.

The **image of Ali** that night endured – not just because of who he was –
but because of what he symbolized:
perseverance, dignity, and purpose under pressure.

Opening ceremonies for the **2026 Olympic Winter Games** – in **Italy** –
were this past **Friday**.

The torch was lit, and – now – the games are in full swing.

And millions – if not billions – of people – around the world –
are watching athletes compete on the global stage.

From bobsled tracks to ice rinks,
from opening ceremonies to gold medal finishes,
we’re captivated.

And not only by the *athletic excellence*, but by the *spirit behind it*.

That is to say, every athlete *represents more than themselves*:

They represent their flag..., their culture..., and their values....

Every every victory claimed – and every anthem played – is a message:

This is who we are.

And nothing captures that symbolism better than the **Olympic flame**.

Since its modern inception –

the lighting of the **Olympic cauldron** –

has been one of the most anticipated – and symbolic –
moments of the games.

All eyes are on the **torch bearer** –

chosen to ignite the flame at the **opening ceremony**.

It is a moment loaded with history, pride, and meaning.

That **singular flame** –

passed from hand to hand, across miles and continents – reminds us that
some lights are meant to be shared.

And – once lit – they are meant to burn for much more than a moment.

Before the **Olympic flame** reached **San Siro Stadium** – in **Milan** –
it had been on a journey.

That journey began **November 26, 2025**, in **Olympia, Greece**.

There – per tradition –

the lighting ceremony took place at the **Temple of Hera** –

using a parabolic mirror to concentrate the rays of the sun.

The flame then traveled to **Athens** – for the handover ceremony.

When the torch arrived in **Rome** – on **December 5** –

it stayed there for only two days –

before being carried through 20 regions of Italy,

all 110 provinces,

and the islands of Sicily, and Sardinia.

More than **10,000 torch bearers** participated in the relay –
ensuring *broad representation* of cultures, and regional histories.

The light that was lit in **Olympia** was *lit for the long run* —
hundreds of miles, and two countries.

And – now – it will broadcast its light – it will shine forth –
throughout these winter games!

Jesus, too, speaks of a *broad re-presentation* of **an essential message**:

In **Matthew Chapter 5** – early in what we call the **Sermon on the Mount** –
Jesus looks at a group of *very ordinary disciples* –
and says something *quite extraordinary*:
“You ARE the light of the world.”

Not, **“TRY to be light.”**

Not, **“If you WORK HARD ENOUGH, you MIGHT BECOME light.”**

No, **Jesus** says you **ARE** the light. **ALREADY.** By virtue of following him.

And – with that *declaration* – comes *responsibility*.

Jesus says,
“A city built on a hill cannot be hid.

**“People do not light a lamp and put it under the bushel basket;
rather, they put it on the lampstand,
and it gives light to all in the house.”** (vv. 14-15)

In other words, your light has a purpose — to *shine*.

To *be visible*. To *make a difference*.

But here's the challenge: our light does not always *feel* bright.

Faith can flicker.

Conviction can wane.

We can get tired, disillusioned, and distracted.

We can forget that the world is watching – and we stop shining.

And that's where Jesus' words are both encouragement – *and* a warning.

Don't fade.

Don't hide.

Don't forget who you are.

Stay lit — for the long run.

**So, Jesus begins with a stunning affirmation –
concerning the *disciples' identity*:**

"You ARE the light of the world."

(v. 14)

Remember, he *is not* speaking to scholars – or celebrities.

Rather, he *is speaking* to fishermen, tax collectors, common laborers —
everyday people....

And, he tells them that *they* are light!

So, light *is not just what we do*;
it is *who we are* – *when we belong to Christ*.

Just as the sun does not try to shine — it just does —
we, too, radiate God's truth – and love –
when we stay connected to the source.

It is interesting that – in **John 8:12** –
Jesus refers to himself as the *“light of the world.”*

And – in today’s **Gospel reading** –
he calls his disciples the *“light of the world.”*

So, as the brothers and sisters of Jesus – and as **children of God** –
it is in our *spiritual DNA* to *be light* –
and to *shed light* – wherever we are.

Rather amazing – is it not!

The **Olympics** also remind us that athletes *train for years* –
to represent *something beyond themselves*.

And – in our **Gospel reading** – Jesus is saying that we – too –
are representing *something much bigger*:
The very kingdom of God!

Our **character**, our **kindness**, and our **convictions** *are not* private things.

They are meant to shine.

In Jesus’ day, cities – like **Jerusalem, Hebron, and Samaria** –
stood proudly *on the hills.....visible – for miles around*.

Night time travelers could look up – *and see the lights of these cities* –
and know they were nearing safety, community,
and the promise of rest.

A city on a hill *was not* trying to be seen.
It just was.

Its elevation made it – *unavoidably* – visible.

Jesus – then – uses this metaphor for a *specific reason*.

Jesus intended to remind his listeners – and the inhabitants of Galilee –
that their lives – *like ours* –
were meant to *shed* light, to *add* light, and to *spread* light.

In other words, our *raison d'être* is not to *hoard* the light – or to *hide* the light –
but to *share* the light.

Furthermore, this light *is not* meant for show:
Its purpose is to influence....., to guide....., and to lead.....

For his part, Jesus believed that *the people gathered* –
on this hillside, above the Sea of Galilee, not far from Tiberius –
could be the first of what we call *influencers* today.

You are called – he said – to *influence*, and to *be influencers*.

So *it is* that the way we treat others – speak, spend, forgive, and care —
these things become like lights on the hillside,
guiding others toward hope, toward love,
and – ultimately – toward **God**.

We may not even realize *who is watching* –
or, *how far* our light reaches.

But – nevertheless – *faith lived out* becomes a **beacon** –
just as those ancient cities – on the hills – were to weary travelers.

But – *to be honest* – we may sometimes wish we could hide.

It is easier not to be noticed.

But Jesus' **metaphor** won't let us off the hook:
Our light *is not* meant for secrecy.
We are not called to glow in isolation.

Rather, we are *called to influence* – by *keeping our light visible*.

Jesus' teaching also affirms that light has *an essential, utilitarian purpose*:

The light reveals. It shows what is real. It makes the hidden visible.

Our lives – then – should reveal **God's heart** –
which is a heart of compassion, truth, and mercy.

And so – **Jesus** explains – that we are the light of the world –
so that *“they [the world's people] may see your good works,
and give glory to your Father in heaven.”*

And so, we shine – not to impress – but to direct.

Not to draw attention to ourselves, but to highlight **God**.

In a similar vein, the goal of a **lighthouse** *is not* to say, *“Look at me!”*
but – rather – to say, *“Look at – and find – the safe way home.”*

Jesus calls us to live in such a way that *our lives point beyond us* —
to the **source of all light** —
and, to the **safety of our eternal home**.

That is our purpose.

Now – when shopping for **lightbulbs** –
we often buy those that promise to *last the longest*,
for the *least amount of money*.

But, how – then – does this metaphor translate into keeping our own lamps lit –
when everything going on in the world,
and – sometimes – in our personal lives –
seems determined to blow them out?

How do we keep shining – especially when the world feels so dark?

How do we find meaning – in whatever we are doing?

Last summer, *top-ranked golfer* **Scottie Scheffler** was interviewed –
about *what drives him*,
what gives his life meaning,
and what *does not*.

He said that he enjoys golf – but golf *is not* what brings meaning to his life.

In another – somewhat related interview – **Arthur Brooks**,
a professor at **Harvard Business School**,
and author of *The Happiness Files: Insights on Work and Life*,
was interviewed by a staffer at *The New York Times*.

That interview *focused exclusively* on **Scheffler's** remarks.

Brooks – then – brought up **Olympic medalists**:

“Research ... shows that the happiest Olympic medalists
are the bronze medalists.

The **bronze medalists** compared themselves,
for the rest of their lives,
to the losers who didn't medal.

The **silver medalists** compared themselves –
for the rest of their lives –
with the gold medalists.
and they're the unhappiest by far of the three medal winners.

They die earliest, and they're [the] unhappiest.”

As for the **gold medalists**,
A majority of Olympic gold medalists suffer
from clinical depression in the three months
[immediately] after winning their gold medal.

[That is] because it *does not* [ultimately] *satisfy*.”

So, here's the secret: *light does not try harder.*

As the "*light of the world,*"
we do not compare ourselves to winners.....or losers.

And, we *keep our own lamps lit* – by staying connected to the **Power Source.**

If we watch the **Olympics** over the next two weeks,
we will get to know some athletes....up close and personal.

We will discover that they don't just show up and perform.

Rather, they train relentlessly.

They endure setbacks, injuries, fatigue — and keep going.

And, the successful ones don't compare themselves to others.

Similarly, *to stay lit for the long run* means to remain rooted in **Christ**,
consistent in **faith**,
and faithful in **witness** — even when it's hard.

To be sure – on some days – we may feel like *flickering candles* ...
like *silver medalists* – standing between the winner and a loser.

But even flickering candles *still give light.*

And – in **deep darkness** – even a flicker can *change everything.*

We are the light of the world.

Not by accident.

Not by effort.

But by calling.

And, this dark world needs our light.

Not our perfection, but our presence.

Our grace, our truth, and our endurance.

So, let us shine.

Shine in the hospital room.

Shine in the classroom – *including life-long-learning.*

Shine in the break room.

Shine in family gatherings.

Shine in the voting booth.

Shine in times of grief.

Shine in seasons of hope.

Friends, we *are* the light of the world.. And, the world *is* watching.

May our light burn like the **Olympic flame** —

bold, visible, unwavering, and *lit* — *for the long run.*

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Amen.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH (*Unison*)

Adapted from A Brief Statement of Faith (1983)

In sovereign love, God created the world good, and makes everyone equally in God's image, male and female, of every race and people, to live as one community. But we rebel against God; we hide from our Creator. Ignoring God's commandments, we violate the image of God in others and ourselves, accept lies as truth, exploit neighbor and nature, and threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care. We deserve God's condemnation. Yet God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation....Loving us still, God makes us heirs with Christ of the covenant. Thanks be to God! Amen.

CHARGE AND BENEDICTION

We ARE the light of the world!

And – when we rely on the power of the Holy Spirit –
we WILL be *lit for the long run!*

Let us receive the Lord's benediction.....