

St. Thomas' Newark DE Sunday Feb. 5, 2017 Theological Education Sunday
Francie Thayer

Gracious and Loving God, we pray for the hearts of the hearers, that your Invitation may be heard through the words spoken and your Love may be known through the message shared. Amen.

Good morning!

I'd like to thank Paul for his kind invitation to be with you this morning on what is designated as Theological Education Sunday. I am especially grateful because while I am one with some theological education, and I am also a lay person. When I first mentioned back in 2010 to my home parish rector that I wanted to go to seminary, he immediately (over my protests) created a Parish Discernment Committee to "get the process started". I trusted the process and it confirmed what I had discerned in my prayer well before that committee ever met... God 's invitation for me is to be a servant-leader in the church from the platform of the laity. I went to seminary, I got a degree, I got a lay preaching license, and it was not about ordination.

So... 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 the bushel basket, but on the lampstand and it gives light to all in the house.

YOU are the light of the world. You have gifts, you have talents, you have abilities that the world needs. God has created you to be THAT PERSON in the world, bringing exactly what is needed. You are uniquely created to be the one God moves through, speaks through, acts through to bring the world a little bit closer to the Kingdom.

But there's more to this than being a bundle of God-given talents to share. This morning's Gospel says very directly—You are the light of the world. Even more than your gifts, YOU are the light of the world. You.... that true-self person that is deep inside yourself. Not the roles you play, not the works you do, not the tangible gifts you share... but you.... Your true self. Your Really Real Self.

Do you know her? Do you know him?

The human journey is about re-discovering that person you came into the world as. Thomas Keating, Richard Rohr, Parker Palmer and a raft of others write about the True Self. Families happen to us, relationships happen to us, indeed life happens to us, all molding and shaping us in ways that distance us from our True Selves. But God's intention in creating you—the True You—is to have you be you in the world for God's sake.

There are some great sermons to be pulled out of this line of thought, but really, today, I want to talk about is the bushel baskets.

What are the bushel baskets in your life that keep you from being the light of the world? that keep you from letting your light shine? Bushel baskets come into our lives in all shapes and sizes and from all points of origin. So here's a little story:

Peter and I were married in 1982 and our children were born in 1985, '86 and '88. Through God's generous grace we were able to manage my being an at-home Mom with the kids as long as they lived under our roof. In 2006 when the last one went to college, I had successfully (I thought) worked myself out of a job. Now what? I thought I wouldn't have minded rolling right into the next phase of at-home-Mom-ness---- being a grandma, ---but our 3 Millenials have other ideas... that's not happenin' right now...

I thought I had lived those years letting my light shine. And I had, no question... But now what. I entered a pretty dark and bumpy time. Bushel baskets everywhere. I remembered, though, a childhood dream I had stuffed: I had always wanted to go to seminary. Bushel Baskets started appearing as soon as I first articulated this remembrance. Bushel Basket #1—But you're OLD! Too old to waste the money on a degree at this stage of your life... Bushel Basket #2—Seminary is for people who want to be priests. Both of these Bushel Baskets that I carried were keeping me from letting my light shine. Through God's grace working through my husband and a mentor at the time, I was able to wriggle my way out from under those baskets... only to duck under the next one. To go to Seminary, I would have to take the GRE's—Total deal-breaker. I couldn't lift that Bushel Basket. I didn't have the courage. So I went to Seminary as a part time, non-degree student. (I didn't have to take the GRE's to be that.) But my year of taking two classes was so wonderful, it gave me the strength to lift that bushel basket... I found the courage to take the GRE's. I became a full time Master's degree student at Virginia Theological Seminary.

Can you think of Bushel Baskets that have been yours? That have kept you from living out of that place of your True Self--- that have limited you in letting your light shine? How have you gotten out from under bushel baskets in the past? What has helped you shatter them?

Here's another bushel basket I have wrestled with all my life. I am the youngest of 5 kids. The first four went to Stanford, Dartmouth, University of Virginia and Duke. I went to Trinity College in Hartford CT. Now Trinity is a much different place now than in 1975 when I showed up. Back then, during Freshman week as we got to know one another the first two questions were "Where are you from?" and "Where was *your* first choice?" And we all had answers to that second question and the answer was not Trinity College. Could I actually do the work at VTS? This was a major bushel basket for me to get out from under. In May of 2014, I got my Masters degree in Interdisciplinary Studies in Religion. Another bushel basket jettisoned.

Now I am the Director of the Retreat House in Hillsboro MD. The Retreat House is housed in a little church and parish hall that had sat empty for 20 years before we got there. Bishop Bud Shand, the then-Bishop of Easton invited me to bring this into being, part of his vision to re-purpose the buildings. When I started in June 2014, Bushel Baskets were everywhere!!! My parents' 1950-style message to me was "teacher, nurse or wife and mother." Create and direct a Retreat House?? Major Bushel Basket... And then there was the Advisory Board of the Retreat House: at their second meeting they decided that we will **radically** trust God in the finances. My father was a banker Bushel Baskets everywhere...

But----- God. God, whose prayer for all of God's created ones is that we have life and have it abundantly..... God has faithfully walked with us. God, the Master Bushel Basket Smasher.

Now, the Retreat House is thriving. We have programming for the spring that is vibrant and diverse. We have only just started with a regular one-day-a week volunteer and two part-time employees. Living in a radical trust of God and the Spirit, while it still takes concentration most times, is coming much more naturally. There is the detritus of bushel baskets everywhere you walk... and the Light of the Spirit is shining brightly, through all who come through the door.

So what are your bushel baskets? We all have them... Some come from our family of origin or from church influences or from society and living in America. Some come because of health issues or misfortunes or traumas we have absorbed. They are a part of life.... but they don't have to dictate our lives.

But today's scripture tells us that YOU----- are the LIGHT---- of the world. You may even now be on a lampstand. What will you do with your bushel baskets?

Maybe you are part of this community at St. Thomas and you have energy and passion for some project. Do you have a bushel basket that tells you that you can't get ahead of the clergy to do the work? Do you have a bushel basket that says "I'm only a lay person. I can't do that. We'll just wait for Paul to do it." Yeah, sure, Paul is the light of the world too... but only because he is a child of God, just like you, not because of his collar. Put that bushel basket down... Scripture gives the directive: Let your light shine!!

And now, more than ever, in this precious community of St. Thomas', the shining of your light is needed. Times of transition always invite us to shine our light all the more clearly and fully. What does that look like for you? Likely, it looks like engagement with the community. It looks like showing up. It looks like loving each other by listening to each other well and deeply. You shine your light in a time of transition by bringing your best self to all your connections to this place. Your presence is important. Your Light matters.

You are made in the image and likeness of God. God loves you with an unconditional love that covers everything you have ever done and everything you ever will do. You are the light of the world. Not will be, might become, perhaps can earn the privilege... No... You ARE—right now—the Light of the world. And we live in a world that desperately and deeply needs that Light. It is a light created by God for this very moment. Scripture doesn't direct us to light anything on fire, or to get aggressive with forcing our light on others. We are invited to simply let our light shine. God will take it from there. Love others from that place of True Self. Work through your bushel baskets. Let your light shine so that others will see and be guided closer to God.

~~Amen.