



Sermon Notes: Steve Stanis,

11 May 2025

“Living in the Light of Christian Community”

Readings: Mark 4:21-25, Isaiah 60:1-3, Philippians 2:12-18

Introduction

This short sermon series is based on “Having Ears to Hear”. We defined this last week as a call to listen, not just with our physical ears, but with our hearts and minds, ready to receive and respond to God’s truth.

In (Mark 4:21-25), Jesus uses the imagery of a lamp to illustrate the responsibility of those who have received the truth: they must share it, not hide it. This passage emphasises both revelation and responsibility, illuminating how we are to live as light-bearers, shining Christ’s love.

Nicki and I used to live in Tamworth, NSW. Tamworth is famous for more than its country music and golden guitar. A town who love to two types of music, country and western! On November 9, 1888, Tamworth became the first town in Australia to have electric street lighting, earning it the title “The First City of Light.” The town’s council chose electricity over gas lamps and partnered with Crompton & Co. of England to install a steam-powered generator near the Peel River, which powered 52 streetlights. The switch to electric light was a major technological leap, making Tamworth a pioneer in modern infrastructure ahead of Sydney and Melbourne. Good old Tamworth!

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who I don’t believe has ever been to Tamworth, is a theologian deeply concerned with living as light bearers, shining Christ’s love. He wrote extensively on how believers are called to live together in light of God’s truth. He believes that Christian community is a divine gift, built upon the foundation of Christ’s self-giving love. But Bonhoeffer’s theology was not shaped in comfort or theory alone. He lived and wrote during the rise of Nazi Germany, a time when darkness loomed large across Europe. As a pastor and theologian, he had to grapple with what it meant to shine Christ’s light in a society increasingly shaped by fear, hatred, and evil. Refusing to remain silent in the face of injustice, Bonhoeffer was part of the Confessing Church, a movement that stood against Hitler’s attempt to control the German church. Eventually, his commitment to truth and justice led him to join a resistance effort against the Nazi regime, a decision that ultimately cost him his life. From within prison walls, he continued to write about grace, discipleship, and the cost of following Christ. Bonhoeffer’s life reminds us that the call to bear the light of Christ is not sentimental or safe, it’s often costly, but it is in the darkness that light is most needed and most visible.

Like Bonhoeffer, if we have truly heard Christ’s message, we must not only receive His light but share it in the community of faith and beyond. Today, we will explore how having “ears to hear” means embracing the responsibilities of Christian community, sharing truth, fostering authentic relationships, and embodying Christ’s love.

We need each other.

We need communities to sustain us, but if our communities are to survive and prosper, we must engage with them and nurture them. That’s the beautiful symmetry of human society: to survive, we need communities and if those communities are to survive, they need us.

Let me pray:

Heavenly Father,

You are the source of truth, light, and love.

You have called us to hear Your Word and to live it, to receive Your light and share it with the world around us.

Open our hearts today so that we may truly listen, not just with our ears, but with our lives.

We pray this in the name of Jesus, our Light and our Guide.

Amen.

The Lamp Must Shine: Living Out the Gospel Openly:

From (Mark 4:21);

“Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed?

Instead, don't you put it on its stand? “

The light is meant to illuminate, not to be hidden. Just as a lamp fulfills its purpose when placed where it can shine, so too must the truth of God's Word be shared in the life of believers. Our faith should be a visible, lived-out faith. Jesus' teaching about not hiding a lamp speaks directly to Bonhoeffer's challenge that Christians must not hide their faith for comfort or safety. Like the lamp, disciples are meant to be seen, and their faith must illuminate the darkness. This speaks to the call for costly grace, a faith that acts, even when it costs everything.

Faith is Communal – Not Private:

The Christian life is not individualistic. The light of the Gospel is meant to be shared in community, not hidden.

Just as Jesus says the lamp belongs on a stand to light the whole house, faith must be expressed in the life of the Christian community, through service, confession, and mutual encouragement. Be warned against the tendency to privatise faith or conceal struggles from one another. This call to share light is directly connected to the grace of God.

(John 1:16) says;

“From His fullness we receive grace upon grace.”

The grace we receive is not meant for us alone; it is meant to flow through us to others. The measure of grace we use, our generosity in forgiveness, encouragement, and love, will be the measure we receive. When we embrace community, we become vessels of God's abundant grace.

This has profound implications for our relationships within the church.

When we truly hear God's Word, we are called to encourage and build one another up.

A community that listens but does not speak light into other's lives does not grow.

Hearing must lead to responding by building positively into the lives of others.

Sharing light through action.

Hidden Things Revealed: Confession and Authenticity:

Jesus continues in (Mark 4:22);

“For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open”.

This verse highlights the revealing nature of God’s kingdom. The truth of the Gospel is not meant to be obscure or secret; rather, it must be proclaimed so that all may come to know Christ.

The tendency of human nature is to hide weaknesses, failures, and struggles, much like placing a lamp under a bowl. However, true community is built upon authenticity and vulnerability, where believers are safe to bring their struggles into the light. In practical terms, this means that the church should be a place where people can be honest about their burdens.

On Friday, I had a phone call from Margaret Beazley. Just a small gesture, a phone call.

But it set something in motion. She asked me to visit a woman in Bonaira who was dying. When I arrived, her son was there. We talked for over an hour. He cried as he remembered his mother. This man, an accomplished orthopaedic surgeon, strong and stoic, opened his heart in that room. We prayed together. I prayed for his mother, and I prayed for him. This morning, he called me. He said, “We’re Catholic, but I’d like you to lead the funeral. I felt understood. I felt valued.”

And now, together, we’ll prepare a service that will open discussions about God and faith. From little things, just a phone call, God is at work. He weaves grace into the spaces we least expect. Faithfulness in the small things is never wasted in the hands of God. It’s never too late to take hold of the lamp that is lit.

Too often, churches become environments where people feel pressure to appear to have it all together, rather than places of grace where they can truly be known.

If we have ears to hear, we will recognise the call to live honestly with one another, creating a safe space where God’s light can penetrate even the darkest corners of our hearts. Just like the Northern Lights illuminating the winter sky, the Field of Light at Uluru transforming the desert with colour, like Vivid in Sydney, or the streets of Berkeley Light Up, glowing with warmth and vibrancy. Just as these lights break through the darkness, so too should the church shine as a beacon of hope, truth, and grace for all who seek it.

Jesus Wins!

This process of revealing and transformation ties directly to (2 Corinthians 3:18), where Paul writes;

“We are being transformed from one degree of glory to another.”

Our transformation into Christlikeness is not an isolated journey; it occurs in community.

As we hear God’s Word and receive grace from others, we grow.

If we have ears to hear, we will recognise that God uses Christian community as a means of becoming more like Jesus, shaping us through honesty, encouragement, and love.

The Measure You Use: Generosity in Listening and Giving:

Jesus then says in (Mark 4:24),

“Consider carefully what you hear... With the measure you use, it will be measured to you and even more”.

Here, Christ connects the act of hearing with the responsibility of giving. The more we invest in God’s truth, the more we receive in return. Likewise, the more we pour into our brothers and sisters in Christ, the more God blesses our community. True community is marked by selfless giving. The Christian life is one of service, where each believer exists for the other. This is the essence of Christ’s love, sacrificial, patient, and ever giving.

What does this mean for us? It means being generous not just with material resources, but also with our time, our attention, and our grace. It means truly listening when someone shares their burdens. It means being patient with those who are struggling.

It means extending forgiveness, just as Christ has forgiven us.

In today’s world, where many feel isolated and unheard, the church must be a countercultural community of deep listening and abundant generosity. If we have ears to hear, we will not only receive God’s grace but extend it in tangible ways to those around us. (John 10:10) states; *“I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly.”*

This abundant life is not merely about personal blessing but is meant to be shared.

When we listen to God’s truth and respond with obedience, we experience the overflow of His life. This abundance is reflected in our generosity. Just as we are transformed from glory to glory, we are called to move from selfishness to selflessness, from isolation to deep connection.

The Growth of the Kingdom: Small Beginnings, Great Impact:

Jesus concludes with (Mark 4:25);

“Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them”.

This might seem harsh at first, but Jesus is speaking about responsiveness to God’s truth.

Those who listen and act on God’s Word will see growth, while those who ignore it will find themselves spiritually barren.

When a church listens to God’s call, lives out the Gospel, and shares it with the world, it becomes a powerful witness.

We may feel that our individual acts of faithfulness, our prayers, encouragements, and small acts of service, are insignificant. But Jesus reminds us that those who listen and respond will be entrusted with more. A single light may seem small, but when many lights shine together, the result is transformative. There is a West African proverb that says if you feel too small to make a difference, think about the effect of a mosquito you are alone with in a room.

Having Ears to Hear in Christian Community:

Jesus’ words in (Mark 4:21–25) challenge us to reflect deeply on how we listen and how we respond. If we truly have ears to hear, we will:

- **Shine the light of Christ:** Speaking truth with grace and encouragement into one another’s lives. We kindle that light by listening well and discerning how best to meet others where their light is flickering or glowing.
- **Live Christ’s light with authenticity:** Choosing vulnerability over pretence and creating a community where grace abounds, and differences are honoured.
- **Practice generous listening:** Bearing one another’s burdens with the patience and compassion of Christ. We meet people where they are, not with judgement, but with love that reflects Jesus’ own heart.

- **Trust in small beginnings:** Knowing that even the tiniest seed of faith, when nurtured, can grow into something abundant and lasting in God’s kingdom. We sow in faith, believing the Spirit will bring the harvest.
- **Embrace transformation:** Recognising that we are continually being shaped from one degree of glory to another. Christian community is not optional. It is the environment where we grow into Christlikeness together.
- **Live into God’s abundance:** Knowing His grace is not limited. As we extend love and serve one another selflessly, we experience the measureless richness of life in Him.

Conclusion:

A church that truly listens and responds to God’s Word will not only be transformed itself but will become a beacon of light to the world. Like a city on a hill that cannot be hidden, like the glow of a lighthouse guiding lost seafarers to shore, we are called to radiate the hope, truth, and love of Christ.

So, let us have ears to hear. Let us embrace the responsibilities of Christian community, shining God’s light in all we do. May our lives reflect His grace in the way we speak, act, and love, illuminating dark places with the warmth of His presence. And as we listen and respond, may we experience the full abundance of life in Christ, not only for ourselves but for all those who are drawn to His light through us.

The Kingdom is here. The Sower is still scattering seed. The harvest is waiting. May we be ready because one thing is certain: He is coming, ready or not!

Amen