

June 3. Read Matthew 5:14-16. This month we are highlighting what it means to be the church. Jesus said God calls us to be “the light of the world,” people through whom God’s light brightens the dark, hurting places around us. God’s love, we have seen over the last 40 years, changes lives when we share that love by letting our light shine. As people see the good things we do, we want them to praise, not just us, not just our church, but our Father in heaven. Jesus said, “A city on top of a hill can’t be hidden.” In what ways will our actions, as well as our buildings, help or hinder how well we fulfill the “visibility” part of Jesus’ vision? Jesus also said we are to let our light shine so that people who see what we do will praise God. How can we work to ensure that efforts to make our church visible lead people to praise God, not just us? On a more personal level, who has been a light in your life? What have you learned about living as a channel for God’s light from their example? Thank that person or persons. And who do you know whose world you have an opportunity to brighten? Prayerfully choose one specific step you can take to bring the light of God’s love into their life this week

June 4. Read 1 Peter 2:5, 9-10. Peter wrote that God’s mercy builds us into a community of people who can show forth God’s marvelous light. Peter no longer believed that only a select few people got to be priests. God, he said, calls all believers (including you) to be a “royal priesthood.” Our God-given mission is to “speak of the wonderful acts of the one who called you out of darkness into his amazing light.” “A chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation” (verse 9). Peter applied Old Testament terms for Israel to God’s people, “the church.” How can we show God’s grace and light by acting together in ways we can’t do alone? How can a sense that together we are God’s hands in the world help us give us energy and courage? Some Bible scholars believe 1 Peter may have been adapted from instruction to new converts at their baptism. How, if at all, do you remind yourself of your confirmation, baptism or other time when you first “owned” your faith in Jesus? How does your identity as a Christ-follower shape your day-to-day life?

June 5. Read Isaiah 52:7-8, Romans 10:11-15. Paul stated a basic premise behind his tireless missionary work in verse 12: “There is no distinction between Jew and Greek, because the same Lord is Lord of all.” Many people in his day disagreed. He quoted their own Scriptures—Joel 2:32 in verse 13, and Isaiah 52:7 in verse 15. God wanted to reach everyone in the world, he said. And how were all those people going to hear about God’s love in Christ if no one went and shared with them? For us, the main issues are not between Gentiles and Jews (though we should get rid of any lingering anti-Semitic attitudes or practices). But differences in education, income, social prestige or sexual preference block many people from coming to the church. Paul’s challenge was: “How can they call on someone they don’t have faith in? And how can they have faith in someone they haven’t heard of? And how can they hear without a preacher?” What role can you play in taking the love of Jesus outside the walls of the church? Will you do it? In the Old Testament book of Jonah, the prophet didn’t want to see Nineveh’s citizens (enemies of Israel) forgiven and saved. At the book’s end, God asked, “For my part, can’t I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than one hundred twenty thousand people?”(Jonah 4:11) Are there people you see as so bad they don’t deserve God’s good news? How can you come to see them as God does?

June 6. Read John 4:23-39. Jesus met a person with three strikes against her: a) she was a Samaritan, b) she was a woman and c) she'd had multiple husbands. He surprised his disciples by engaging her in honest conversation. Verses 28-30 showed her being the first witness to Jesus (the first "preacher") in John's gospel! As more Samaritans came to him because of her testimony, Jesus told his disciples, who'd written the Samaritans off, "Look at the harvest." For what reasons were Jesus' disciples surprised when they found Jesus talking with this woman? In what ways were their eyes not open to her value, or that of the other Samaritans who made their way toward Jesus (verse 30)? If you had been one of the disciples, would you have been surprised, upset or happy? Who are the people you tend to look right past? How do you understand the exchange Jesus had with his disciples in verses 31-34? We know Jesus needed to eat, like any human being. How did being about his God-given mission provide inner fuel and strength for him? When, if ever, have you been so engrossed in something you were doing to carry out God's mission that you almost hated to stop to eat?

June 7. Read 2 Corinthians 5:14-20. The apostle Paul said humanity's spiritual problem is that we are alienated from God. But the good news, he said, is that God is NOT angry or alienated from us. God loves us, wants to reconcile us to himself, and acted in Christ to bring that about. As we become a "new creation" in Christ, God makes it our mission to call others to "be reconciled to God." What historical event or person seems to you to present the most vivid picture of God's reconciling work in the world? In what ways did God work through that person or event to bring about reconciliation and wholeness? In your own life, when have you seen anger and pain changed for the better as reconciliation takes place? The Message paraphrased verse 20 as "Become friends with God; he's already a friend with you." Do you picture God as eager to be reconciled with all human beings, or not? How has your reconciliation with God made you "a new creature in Christ"? Who do you know who needs to hear that good news?