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My assumption about us who are here this morning is that most of us are serious about making a difference in this world. Most of us want our lives to count. Most of us are concerned about the quality of life on this planet and we would like to make a difference. We would like to influence this world to become more like the kingdom of God, more like God's intention for humankind. But, some of us get discouraged. We feel frustrated because we aren't quite sure how to go about it. We often see little progress, or little evidence that we are making a difference.

Fifty years ago a Johns Hopkins professor gave a group of graduate students an assignment to go into the slums, take 200 boys between the ages of 12 and 16, investigate their background and environment, and then predict their chances for the future. The students, after consulting social statistics, talking to the boys, and compiling much data, predicted that 90% of the boys would spend some time in jail.

Twenty-five years later another group of graduate students was given the job of testing the prediction. They went back to the slum area. Some of the boys who were now men were still there; a few had died, some had moved away, but they got in touch with 180 of the original 200. And they found that only four of the group had ever been sent to jail; only 2% instead of the 90% predicted. Why was it that these men, who had lived in a breeding place of crime, had such a surprisingly good record? The researchers were continually told, "Well, there was a teacher..."

They pressed further and found that in 75% of the cases it was the same woman public school teacher. The researchers found this teacher who was now living in a home for retired teachers. They asked her if she could tell them how she had exerted this remarkable influence over a group of slum children. She answered, "No, I really couldn't tell you. I really don't know." And then, thinking back over those years, she said, more to herself than to her questioners, "I loved those boys..."

As I reflect on the people who influenced me, I can name you school teachers and ministers. Perhaps many of them wonder if they ever influenced anyone. Perhaps many of them were impatient because they didn't see immediate results. The school teacher in the story waited 25 years for evidence of her influence.

But, not many of us here this morning are school teachers with a ready-made audience. Not many of us are Samuels, the Old Testament prophet who chose Saul and, in our Old Testament lesson this morning, then David to be king. Samuel had tremendous influence and changed the course of history. Some of you, modestly perhaps, are inclined to doubt your influence. "After all," some say, "I'm only one person. I have no great talent. I don't know many people. I'm not a public figure. How can I make a difference?" Let me give you a practical suggestion on how you can make a difference.

In the Epistle lesson this morning, Paul developed the biblical theme of light and darkness. Throughout the Bible, darkness is used as a description of evil, sin and ignorance. When the light of God shines, darkness is dispelled; and healing, salvation, reconciliation, hope replace the darkness. Paul encouraged the Ephesian Christians to be children of the light and not

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darkness, and in so doing, gives us a method by which we can make a difference. Ephesians 5:11, "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them." The Good News translation reads, "Bring them out to the light." Paul then gives a promise. The method is effective because, (vs. 13) "When anything is exposed by the light it becomes visible." The Good News translation is even clearer, "And when all things are brought to the light, then their true nature is clearly revealed."

You can make a difference by letting the light shine. The light of the sun is itself healing. Sometimes I awaken in the middle of the night and have a difficult time getting back to sleep. It is usually 3:15 or 4:00 a.m. and I lie there with thoughts running through my head. I think of all the things I forgot to do or didn't have time to do the previous day, and I think of all the things I should do the next day. Finally I fall asleep and when I next awaken in sunlight, those lists aren't nearly as depressing! The sunshine dispels depression, brooding, and panic.

One afternoon in Manteca, the police telephoned from a home where a husband and wife were fighting. The wife had called the police because the husband was becoming abusive. The couple didn't know me, but because they had been Methodists a long time ago, the police asked if I would come out to the house. As soon as I arrived, the policeman quickly and gladly left me in charge! I walked into the house. It was dark, the curtains were drawn, and the air was so full of cigarette smoke, I could scarcely breathe. I said, "We need light and air," and proceeded to open the curtains and the windows. Light is healing. They had sat in darkness, evidently for months, with no outside interests, attacking one another. They responded to the light, joined the church, attended every Sunday, joined one of our Fellowship groups, and she became a volunteer worker in our United Methodist Women's Thrift Shop.

Sometimes you can make a difference by letting the sunlight shine. You can also make a difference by letting the light of attention shine. You can make a difference by bringing issues and problems out to the light. The light doesn't mean "answers." Paul told us in this passage that just bringing the matter into the light is healing. A good counselor doesn't attempt to solve people's problems by giving them answers, but by asking questions that bring the problem and all its history out into the open. You can help friends or family members by listening and encouraging them to get the issue out into the open. Let the light shine on it. You do not need to offer solutions or answers. In fact, when you begin offering solutions, the light is turned off. You then discourage further sharing and insight. You can make a difference, not by offering answers, but by encouraging things to be brought out into the light.

When you are having problems with people in your family, or at work, or at church, let the light shine. Get the issue out into the open, on top of the table, away from the telephone gossips where they hint of coverup and misinterpret.

Often, bringing things out into the light raises more questions than answers. If you are the kind of person who prefers answers to questions, solutions to discovery, then you will be uncomfortable letting the light shine. Letting the light shine means to illuminate, not by answers, but by exposure, so that all the ramifications are brought out into the open. I

believe a parent's role in the education of the children is to ask questions of the school teacher and administration. Be helpful, be supportive, but ask those questions that illuminate motivation, procedure, policies, biases, philosophy of education, etc.

Let the light shine, the light of attention. One of the causes we have supported in our home through the years is Klanwatch, an outreach of the Southern Poverty Center. Its purpose is to shine the light of public attention on the activities of the Ku Klux Klan. The Ku Klux Klan loves to hide behind white robes and masks. Exposing their activity to the public has produced dramatic results in the curbing of its activities. Recently, a multi-million dollar settlement was levied against the Klan, as a result of public attention on the Klan's "execution" of a young, black man.

Let the light of attention shine. Amnesty International is an organization which shines the light of public attention on political prisoners. It conducts letter writing campaigns to governments that are holding a prisoner without due process. Amazing results have been achieved. Recently a Lutheran pastor in South Africa, Dean Farasani, was freed. He had previously been jailed and severely tortured. When he was arrested again, Amnesty International let the light shine by making his arrest known to the world. A flood of letters and telegrams were sent to the South African government and he was immediately freed without torture.

Recently the dark side of TV evangelists has been revealed. They who are so quick to condemn and judge are now the center of public attention. Let the light of attention shine on their fund-raising techniques. Let the light of public attention reveal the expenditures of those funds, so that people can see how their giving is really used. And then, let the light shine on how the United Methodist Church uses your contributions, and let you see the difference.

Let the light of attention shine. Our congregation has been very supportive of Rev. Gerry Phelps and Concern for the Poor in its attempts to open a shelter for homeless families in our county. After 17 months of work finding a site for the shelter and completing reams of applications, the San Jose City Council turned down the application. It was a discouraging moment and looked as if Concern for the Poor would go out of business. But, many people were letting the light shine. The council chambers were packed that evening by supporters, including many of you. Television stations and the San Jose Mercury began publicizing the Council's decision. Paul's prediction came true: when things are brought out into the light of public attention, they become visible. So much negative publicity came to the Council they became very cooperative. At its last meeting, the Council set aside one million dollars to assist in the securing of property for homeless family shelters. Concern is now back in business with a new and better site to propose, and will apply for some of those funds.

Don't get discouraged because you think you don't make a difference. Every time you help the light to shine, every letter you write to a public official, every phone call you make, brings things out into the open. Ephesians 5:13: "When all things are brought out to the light, then their true nature is clearly revealed." You can make a difference by letting the light of attention shine.

HOW YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE
I SAMUEL 16:1-13, EPHESIANS 5:8-17

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