This idea of “living dangerously” has been the unifying theme of my preaching since the beginning of 2013. At this point, you might think to yourself, “Enough already! Life in this world is already dangerous enough. I don’t need any more danger in my life. I don’t want any more adventure. I prefer not to have any more disruptive moments to test or refine my faith. If it is all the same to you, instead of ‘living dangerously,’ I would much rather focus on the goodness and grace of God, and the love, peace, and comfort He gives to sustain and strengthen us in the midst of all the ‘danger, toils, and snares’ through which we travel in this life. It is time to move on, don’t you think?”

If, to one degree or another, this expresses how you feel, I understand. The idea of “living dangerously” is not something that comes naturally to me! It pushes me out of my comfort zone. It challenges me to look at my life and the call of God on my life in a fresh way. And it can feel dangerous. In the midst of it, though, as we ponder what it means for each of us to live dangerously as fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ, I hope it is clear that the amazing grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the abounding love of God the Father, and the abiding peace and presence of the Holy Spirit – the blessing of the triune God – undergirds and permeates this life at every moment, and gives us strength for all our todays and hope for all our tomorrows. The God who is full of compassion and grace, wisdom and mercy, power and love, goes before us and is with us at every moment as we answer His call to live dangerously for the honor and glory of His name. After all, that’s what it is really all about. It’s not about you or me or us. It’s all about Him. It’s about His glory. It’s about “the praise of His glorious grace” (Ephesians 1:6). Paul sums it up this way at the end of Romans 11:

*From Him and through Him and to Him are all things.*

*To Him be the glory forever! Amen.*

*(Romans 11:36)*

I’m going to keep on talking about “living dangerously” as followers of Christ until I sense the Lord saying, “Time to move on.” Exactly when that will be, I don’t know. I do know it’s not yet.

**LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE**

Today’s message is not rocket science. If you’re going to live dangerously as a follower of Christ in this world, you can’t hide your faith. What does Jesus say? As a recipient of His grace, your life is to be a light in the world. What is the purpose of light? The purpose of light is to shine. The purpose of light is to illumine the darkness. The purpose of light is to give light. You don’t turn on a light and try to cover it up. You don’t light a candle and then
put a bowl or a bushel basket or a box over it. Of course not. Your life as a follower of the Lord Jesus, as a sinner saved by grace and made new – made spiritually alive – by the power of His love, is to give light to the world around you. Your life is to shine with the light of God’s love and grace and truth. You are to let your light shine in such a way that others will be blessed and God will be praised. That is your mission in life. And mine. It is really quite elementary, don’t you think?

You may be familiar with a television show called “Undercover Boss.” The idea is that the CEO of some big company goes “undercover” as an hourly employee in order to experience what it is really like to work for the company. Inevitably, there is conflict. Inevitably, the CEO learns some valuable lesson(s) and comes to have a greater appreciation for the employees and what they do. And in the end, the “undercover boss” reveals his/her identity.

To be an undercover boss is one thing. To be an undercover Christian is another. As it says in *The Message*, “God is not a secret to be kept.”

Why, then, do so many Christians try to hide their faith? Why do so many of us try to keep our faith hidden? Why are so many Christians afraid to let our light shine, afraid to speak of Jesus and what He has done in our lives, afraid to tell others about God and the wonders of His grace, mercy, love, compassion, wisdom, and power? Why do so many of us feel intimidated whenever we even think of sharing our faith with someone, or expressing our faith in a public way except at church? Why do so many Christians go under cover and try to keep our faith a secret (except when we come to church)? And, to ask one more rhetorical question, if any of this applies to you personally, why do you hesitate to bring your faith out into the open more often than you do?

**HOW TO HIDE YOUR FAITH**

I suppose there may be many reasons why, just as there are many ways to hide your faith instead of letting your light shine. You can hide your faith by simply failing to speak up at an opportune moment, when there is a natural and appropriate conversational opening to give a word of witness or to speak a word of grace or compassion or encouragement. We have all had opportune moments like that when all we had to do was open our mouths and speak, but we remained silent.

You can hide the light of your faith sometimes by just going along with the crowd, and doing what everybody else (or everybody in your group, at least) is doing, even though you know what the crowd is doing is something God does not want you to do. You might go along with the crowd because you just don’t want to make waves. Or you don’t want to be seen as being a goody-goody. Or you don’t want to come across as being judgmental. Or you really, really want to be accepted by the group. So, you choose to hide your faith. At one time or another, we have all probably been there.

If you let some pattern of sin take hold in your life and you refuse to renounce it, you refuse to let go of it, you refuse to deal decisively with it, it will inevitably dim the light of your faith, the vitality of your witness, and the vibrancy of your relationship with God. Unconfessed,
unrepented, unresolved sin will always dim your light and damage your witness. Make sure you examine your heart and life in the light of God’s Word and the illumination of the Holy Spirit to see if your faith in Christ is real, if your life matches your profession of faith, and if there is any besetting sin hindering your fellowship with God or compromising your witness.

THE FEARS THAT HOLD US BACK

Why do so many Christians today hide our faith, instead of letting our light shine? Why are so many of us so reticent to talk openly about our faith? I think it is largely due to fear, though it is not always fear of the same thing or of the same kind.

Some of us hide our light and go undercover with our faith because we are afraid of really messing up if we try to give a verbal witness or say anything to point another person toward God. We are so afraid of not doing it right, so sure we will say the wrong thing, or say the right thing but say it in the wrong way, so unsure of ourselves, and so doubting of God’s ability to speak through us, that we clam up and go mute even when God has perfectly arranged an opportunity for us to live dangerously and speak a word of grace or hope, a word of repentance and forgiveness, into someone’s life. The fear of doing it wrong, of saying the wrong thing and pushing someone farther from God is one reason we choose to hide our faith. Or, to turn it around, we may be paralyzed with fear at the possibility that someone may actually respond positively to our witness and want to turn to the Lord Jesus in repentance and faith, or want to know how to let God be God in their life, and we won’t know what to say or do. We conclude, too many of us, that it is just better if we just keep quiet. Better to keep our faith hidden than to risk doing an imperfect job of representing God. (As if God cannot, does not, or will not use imperfect people in carrying out His mission in the world! With the exception of Jesus, the only people God uses are the imperfect ones. And you know what? He is able, more than able, to make up for our imperfections and to use us anyway. In spite of our imperfections. Have you got that?)

Another reason many Christians go undercover and keep our faith a secret is because we really think people are not interested, and we fear offending them if we try to bring God into a conversation or situation. It is true that some people are not interested. It is also true that some people have a kind of allergic reaction to just about anything having to do with God in general and the Christian faith in particular. And, yes, they are easily offended. So, to avoid the possible risk of offense, we mute ourselves.

Sadly, I think many Christians in America today have been brainwashed (I don’t mean it literally) or bullied by powerful voices in our culture into believing there is no room for our faith in public discourse, and we have no right to use our personal religious beliefs to try to influence others, or to impact the policies of our government. We may hesitate to let our light shine for fear of being told we are stepping on the rights and freedoms of others by taking a stand motivated by our faith on some matter of public life. So, instead of speaking up, instead of speaking the truth in love, instead of speaking words of life and hope and grace and godliness to our culture, we may choose to restrict our expressions of faith to our private religious life and our involvement in church. We fear incurring the criticism, the fury and condemnation of people who demand that we keep our personal beliefs to ourselves.
I can think of other reasons, and I imagine you can, too, but the truth remains that fear of one kind or another is often at the root of our unwillingness to live dangerously by letting the light and love of Jesus shine through us. It is fear – the fear of failing, the fear of being rejected, the fear of embarrassment, or fear of some other kind – that keeps us from taking the risk of sharing our faith in winsome ways with others.

**NOT A SPIRIT OF TIMIDITY**

The Lord reminded me this week of what Paul said to his young protégé, Timothy, in 2 Timothy, which is the last letter Paul wrote. Paul knew the end was near for him. He knew he was soon to die, and this letter is, in effect, his last testament and final appeal to Timothy to live dangerously and boldly as a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. To urge Timothy on with the ministry of the gospel in the face of opposition, he says in 2 Timothy 1:7 that “God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love, and of self-control.” The word Paul uses here for “timidity” or “fear” appears nowhere else in the New Testament. Outside of the Bible, though, it is used to refer to someone who flees from battle, and has the connotation of cowardice. What, then, is Paul saying to Timothy? And to us as well? God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, that we should run from opportunities to bear faithful witness to Him and to the gospel. Timidity concerning the message of grace and the love of God for sinners is not a spiritual gift. Respect, sensitivity, and gentleness are always needed, as Peter tells us in 1 Peter 3:15-16: “Always” (When? Always.) “be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have (in Christ). But do this” (How?) “with gentleness and respect” – with the utmost courtesy, as it says in The Message, keeping a clear conscience before God so that when people criticize or condemn you and throw mud at you, none of it will stick, and they will end up with egg on their faces. (My apology for the mixed metaphor.)

“Cowardice,” as one Bible commentator (C. K. Barrett) has said, “has nothing to do with Christianity.” It is not a mindset of cowardly fear that God has given us, but a spirit of power (the Greek word is *dunamis*) of love (*agape*) and self-control. It is not a spirit of arrogance or conceit. It is not an attitude of superiority or self-righteousness. Heavens, no! It is a spirit of power, yes, but the power is not ours. The power belongs to God. But He graciously allows us to be the channels through which His life-giving, life-changing power flows – if we will let Him use us. It is a mindset of humility, never forgetting that grace is a gift that comes free of charge to people who don’t deserve it and never will. Which includes us. You and me. It is a mindset of love, never forgetting that we, too, are recipients of God’s *agape* love.

Friends, if you have a spirit of timidity or fear when it comes to living out the truth of your faith and letting your light shine for Jesus, God did not give you that spirit. That spirit is not from Him. The spirit He has given us – the Spirit with a capital “S” – is the Spirit of power and love and discernment. Allow His Spirit – the Holy Spirit – to have His way in you and to work through you, enabling you to live dangerously by letting your light shine in this sin-darkened world.
FISHING AND EVANGELISM

As usual, there is much more I want to say. Let me quickly try to pull a few threads together. A pastor friend of mine wrote something this past week about the comparison between evangelism—telling others about Jesus—and fishing. When Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James and John to come and follow Him, He told them to leave their fishing nets and boats behind, and He would make them “fishers of men.” My friend made the observation that when you go fishing, you may not catch anything. But you can be sure that if you never go fishing, you will never catch any fish. You never know what the results will be when you take a risk and open your mouth and speak a simple word of witness (it doesn’t need to be the whole gospel all in one breath, unless the Holy Spirit clearly prompts you to do so). You never know what may come from letting your light shine. But we do know that if we do nothing, if we choose to hide our faith, the result will be … nothing.

THE CALLING OF LEVI (MATTHEW)

Why, you may wonder, did we read the account of Jesus calling Levi in Luke 5? (Levi, by the way, is also known by his other name—Matthew, which means “the gift of God.”) We read this short passage to shine some light on what Levi (or Matthew) did to let his light shine after leaving his old life as a tax collector in order to follow Jesus. He left his old life behind, but he did not forget about his friends and associates from his old life. Instead, he threw a dinner party at his house, with Jesus as the guest of honor. And he invited all his old friends and associates to come, so they would have the opportunity to meet Jesus, too.

Forget about the Pharisees and their reaction. The Pharisees were always throwing penalty flags at Jesus. They were just a bunch of stiff-necked legalists who had no understanding of grace. Look instead at Matthew, and learn from his example. Matthew’s dinner party didn’t just happen. He planned it strategically to bring his old friends into the sphere of Jesus. I can’t help but wonder: Is this something you can do? Is it something I can do? Is it something we as a church can do together? It is something to think and pray about.

If you and I are to live dangerously in this way, if we are to let our light shine and share our faith with boldness and love, we need to train ourselves to think evangelistically and to be on the lookout for opportunities. Peter must have been a Boy Scout, because he said we should “always be prepared” (1 Peter 3:15). Train yourself to think evangelistically. Pray for opportunities. Pray for open doors. Bill Hybels says that he begins each day with this prayer: “My life is in Your hands, God. Use me to point someone toward You today. I promise to cooperate in any way I can. If You want me to say a word for You today, I’ll do that. If You want me to keep quiet but demonstrate love and servanthood, by Your Spirit’s power I will. I’m fully available to You today, so guide me by Your Spirit” (Hybels, Just Walk Across the Room, 37).

Train your mind and heart to think evangelistically and be on the lookout for opportunities. Pray for open doors of conversation or witness or service. And when God opens a door for you, don’t try to close it. Don’t let fear stop you from pointing someone toward God. Don’t
hide your faith. Don’t be an undercover Christian. Determine, by God’s grace and in the power of His Spirit, to live dangerously and let your light shine to the glory of God.

Lord, let it be so in us. Amen.