

Light – Earth Day 2026

Rev. Jennifer Gleichauf

April 19, 2026

Today I have two poems and two short scriptures to lead into the sermon. On this Earth Day celebration Sunday, we thought it would be nice to focus on Light in celebration of the new solar panels that will be installed this summer. The first poem is called Morning Light by Mary Oliver:

Every morning

the good news
pours
through the field

touching

every blossom
every stem
and each of them,

on the instant

offers to be part of it—
offers to lift and hold, willingly
the vast burden of light

all day.

In my life
I have never seen it to fail—
flower after flower

leaf after pearly leaf,

to the acre,
to the massy many,
is silvered, is flooded;

and such voices

spangle among it—
larks and sparrows—
all those small souls—

are everywhere
tossing the quick wheels of pleasure
from their red throats
as they hang on—
as though on little masts
of golden ships,
to the tops of the weeds—
and that's when I come—
that's when I come, crying out to the world:
oh give me a corner of it
to lift also, to sing about, to touch
with my wild hands—and they do.

And also by Mary Oliver, the poem: The Sun

Have you ever seen
anything
in your life
more wonderful

than the way the sun,
every evening,
relaxed and easy,
floats toward the horizon

and into the clouds or the hills,
or the rumpled sea,
and is gone—
and how it slides again

out of the blackness,
every morning,
on the other side of the world,
like a red flower

streaming upward on its heavenly oils,
say, on a morning in early summer,
at its perfect imperial distance—
and have you ever felt for anything
such wild love—

do you think there is anywhere, in any language,
a word billowing enough
for the pleasure
that fills you,
as the sun
reaches out,
as it warms you
as you stand there,
empty-handed—
or have you too
turned from this world—
or have you too
gone crazy
for power,
for things?

And then our scriptures:

John 8:12

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'"

Matthew 5:14-16

"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

I remember a confirmation retreat I led years ago where we went to a new retreat center and we arrived long after dark. We arrived by coming down a long driveway through a forest and were taken into our woodsy cabin. We settled in and went to sleep. In the morning, I got up and decided to go explore a little to figure out where we were before everyone else was up. I opened the door expecting forest and was greeted with the most magnificent view of Lake Michigan sparkling in the sun. In the dark, I hadn't even known it was there. Now, I could see the bright sun dancing on the tops of the waves sparkling and shining. You know what I'm talking about – sun dancing on the water? One of the joys of living this close to the lake.

I remember another summer afternoon I was walking in a field alone in the middle of the day and the light made everything look like it was lit from within. One of those

perfect summer days when everything is so color saturated – the greens are greener, the purple flowers, the yellow dandelions, the glimpses of different colored birds. The sun made it all feel so alive, so technicolor, almost too bright.

And then another time when we were in the Upper Peninsula in the fall and we took a drive up a place called Brockway Mountain Drive. I suppose it is what counts for a mountain in the Midwest. We parked at the top and went to the lookout and it was that time of day that photographers call the magic hour or the golden hour not long before sunset. All the trees below us had turned to yellow leaves which meant in the golden hour of light it truly looked like the whole earth was glowing. Truly like magic.

And I could tell all kinds of other stories about the sunsets I've seen where the sky is painted with color or the way light looks on freshly fallen snow or how it feels to stand in the sun on one of the first warm days of spring or to feel its warmth on your skin as you swim through the ocean or even how the sky lights up at night – stars and the moon reflecting the unseen (to us) sun. And then there is this picture the crew of the Artemis gave us which keeps showing up in my mind's eye ever since I saw it.

Imagine this moment with me for those of us still on earth. That moment, just before dawn, when it feels like the world holds its breath. The darkness is still heavy, the birds have not yet begun, and then — slowly, impossibly — a thin thread of gold appears at the edge of the horizon. Light arrives. Not loudly, not quickly, but just slipping over the horizon and filling the spaces that had just moments before seemed so dark. That moment of the sun's arrival when everything changes, everything is transformed, everything is revealed, everything is made new.

These are the kind of moments Mary Oliver returned to again and again in her writing. And it is the moment at the heart of what Jesus says to us in the Gospel of John.

In our first scripture reading from John, Jesus was speaking in the temple courts during what is called the Feast of Tabernacles, or Sukkot. It is a seven day Jewish festival that takes place in the fall to celebrate the harvest and give thanks for the bounty of creation (much as we are doing today) and to remember God's protection of the Israelites when they were in the desert. On this Sukkot, as Jesus was speaking he was surrounded by great golden lampstands whose flames were meant to recall the pillar of fire that led Israel through the wilderness. And in that fire light, Jesus says simply: *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*

He didn't say *I carry a light* or *I point toward the light*. I am the light.

And what do we know about light? We know that every day the sun shows up, unfailingly, giving itself away without hesitation and with complete constancy. The sun does not ask whether we deserve its warmth. It does not wait for us to earn its rising. It

simply pours itself out over the earth with equal generosity to every part. The sun is one of nature's most beautiful examples of extravagant, unearned grace.

While much of our relationship to the sun is what it lights up for us, we know it also plays an imperative role as the source and sustainer of all things that grow. Similarly through Jesus we can, not only, see the world around us better, but we come to understand Jesus as the source of our life and our spirit. He is our orientation. To follow him is to be led by something that never fails, never wavers, never sets. His light helps to reveal our path and set our course.

But, that isn't to say the light never changes. Just like the sun offers different kinds of light, Jesus comes to us in different ways—sometimes his light warms us when we are feeling alone; sometimes his light gives us a glimmer of hope in a time of darkness in our lives; sometimes his light may shine harshly on things in our lives we know we need to change or atone for; sometimes his light helps to reveal something we hadn't already known or helps us see someone else in a new light; sometimes his light encourage us to grow and transform.

Whatever form it takes, Jesus' light is always there, constant and steady, but receiving light; paying attention to light; welcoming the light is itself a practice. In the poem "Morning Light," Oliver describes the discipline of waking early, of positioning herself to receive what the morning offers. There is nothing passive about her attention. She goes out to meet the light. She opens herself to it— bringing her whole, awake self to the gift being offered.

Which is how we are invited to orient ourselves to Jesus. The light of Christ shines no matter what. But we are invited to turn toward it, to rise and meet it, to open our hearts and let it in. The mystics called this *attentiveness* — a kind of loving, patient watchfulness for the movements of God. Oliver called it paying attention. Jesus called it *following*.

To follow the light is not a single decision made once and never revisited. It is a daily practice, like Oliver's morning walk. We return to it again and again — in prayer, in worship, in the reading of Scripture, in the everyday moments of our days. We go out, morning after morning, day after day, to receive what has been given.

There are so many passages about God being our light, our source. But the other way light comes up frequently in scripture is in the reminder that we are called to be bearers of the light. We heard one example in our second scripture today where Jesus, in his Sermon on the Mount — says: *"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your*

light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

Jesus says we have light within us. We are vessels of light in the world. He doesn't say we were or we might be, if we try hard enough. We *Are*. Present tense. Indicative. The light of Christ received becomes — by some miracle of transformation — the light of Christ carried. We do not generate this light on our own. We are not the sun. We are, perhaps, something like the moon with no light of our own, but capable of reflecting a greater light into the darkness around us.

This is the movement of the Christian life. Receive. Be transformed. Shine.

What does it look like for your light to shine? Jesus is refreshingly concrete: *your good deeds*. Not your theology. Not your correct opinions. Your deeds. Who you are in the world. The people and places where you add light. The child you nurture, the help you offer, the friendship you maintain, the stranger you smile at, the garden you grow, the food you deliver to the grieving, the resources you give to help those in need, the art you create, the beauty you add, the kindness you spread. There are a million ways to be light in the world. Yours doesn't have to look the same as anyone else's, but you are meant to shine.

So, on this earth day Sunday, let's remember together that every morning, the sun rises. It does not ask your permission. It does not require that you be ready for it or worthy of it. It simply comes, pouring its warmth and clarity over everything, making growth possible, making vision possible, making life possible. This is what Christ's presence does in a human soul.

And when Christ's light fills your soul, it seeps out to be light to the rest of the world.

So remember that you are positioned somewhere in the world that no one else occupies. There are people in your life who are stumbling in some kind of darkness — loneliness, grief, confusion, despair — who need the particular quality of light that you, and only you, can offer. Your faithfulness. Your kindness. Your willingness to show up, day after day, morning after morning, the way the sun does.

As our days continue to grow longer, I hope you'll find time to go out and meet the literal light. To let it warm your skin and watch as it dances on the waves or illuminates the rich colors of nature or reveals something new to you. Let it fill you and remind you that God's love and grace is just as real, just as mysterious, just as near. And then, as Oliver might say, go out into the world and do *something* with it — something good, something true, something that makes the people who witness it look up and say, without quite knowing why: *something real is here. Something is alive. Something shines.*

May you choose again and again and again to let your light shine, knowing you can always come back to the source.

Amen.