

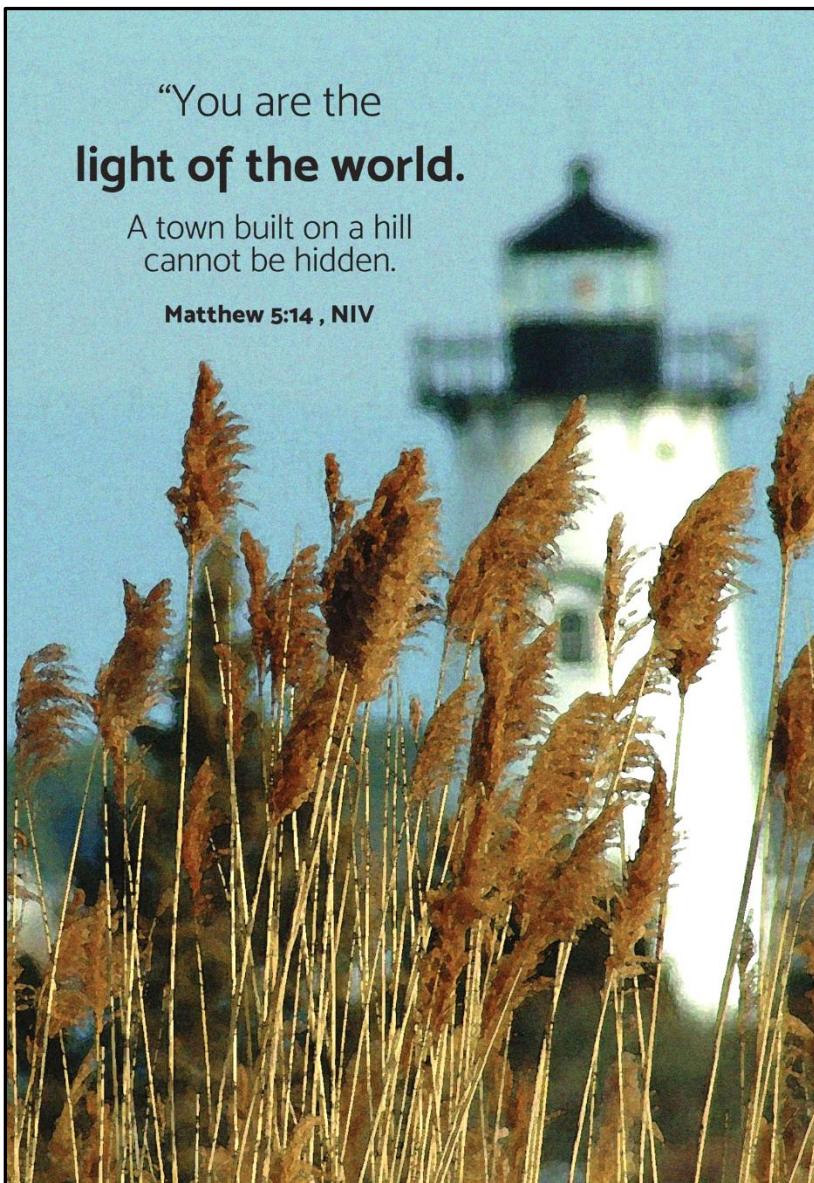
First Congregational United Church of Christ River Falls, Wisconsin

February 8, 2026

“You are the
light of the world.

A town built on a hill
cannot be hidden.

Matthew 5:14 , NIV



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
RIVER FALLS, WISCONSIN

February 8, 2026

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

10:00 am

Gathering

“Salt and light, both commodities in Jesus’ time, sustain life—if you use them...

The purpose of the commodity is in its use.”

- Kat Banakis

Welcome to our guests who are visiting with us today!

- Activity bags are available for children.
- Large print bulletins are available.
- Visitors please stop at the welcome booth.
- Please stand when noted by the *
- Congregation responses are in bold.
- Please note our worship service is livestreamed.

**Our Mission is to Love God and
Serve People.**

**Everyone is Welcome Because
Everyone Matters.**

GATHERING MUSIC

WELCOME AND RINGING OF THE BELL

CALL TO WORSHIP

L: We are the salt of the earth.

P: **We season our community with the love of God.**

L: We are the salt of the earth.

P: **We preserve the life of Christ in the world.**

L: We are the salt of the earth.

P: **We flavor our relationships with mercy and forgiveness.**

L: We are the salt of the earth.

P: **We help to thaw the icy hearts of the cold and dispassionate.**

L: We are the salt of the earth.

P: **We sow integrity, wholeness and joy.**

L: We are the salt of the earth so...

P: **Let us remain ever salty and ever faithful to God's call!**

All: **Come let us worship the God who leads us into life!**

***HYMN**

Arise, Your Light Has Come

Blue #231

***PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

L: Eternal God, our memories are short and we need your nudges to remember your blessings.

P: **Forgive us when we forget you, O God.**

L: We get caught up in the worries and wrinkles of living and lose sight of your abiding presence.

P: **Forgive us when we forget you, O God.**

L: The urgent and the necessary crowd out playful thanksgiving and heartfelt gratitude.

P: **Forgive us when we forget you, O God.**

L: Let your light brighten our way, your peace ease our anxious moments, your love heal our troubled minds, and your joy kindle our memory and hope.

P: **Forgive us when we forget you, O God. Amen.**

*ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

L: Our God is quick to forgive. Friends, hear the good news and receive it with joy:

P: **In Jesus Christ we are set free from the sins of the past and empowered to live a new life here and now.**

L: This is good news!

P: **Alleluia! Amen.**

L: May the peace of the Lord be with you all.

P: **And also with you.**

*PASSING OF THE PEACE

(Please greet one another with signs of peace)

*GLORIA

*We are singing, for the Lord is our light, we are singing for the Lord is our light.
We are singing, for the Lord is our light, we are singing for the Lord is our light.*

*We are singing, oh, we are singing for the Lord is our light.
We are singing, oh, we are singing for the Lord is our light.*

Hearing the Word

SCRIPTURE LESSON

Isaiah 58:6-9a

PSALM 112:1-9 (Cantor will introduce; congregation, please join on refrain)

R



Re - joice, re - joice, re - joice, give thanks, and sing.

L: Praise the LORD! Happy are those who trust the LORD, who greatly delight in God's commandments.

P: **Their descendants will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed.**

L: Wealth and riches are in their houses, and their righteousness endures forever.

P: **They rise in the darkness as a light for the upright; they are gracious, merciful, and righteous.**

L: It is well with those who deal generously and lend, who conduct their affairs with justice.

P: **For the righteous will never be moved; they will be remembered for ever. They are not afraid of evil tidings; their hearts are firm, secure in the LORD.**

L: Their hearts are steady, they will not be afraid; in the end they will look in triumph on their foes.

P: **They have distributed freely, they have given to the poor; their righteousness endures forever; their horn is exalted in honor. R**

Celebrating the Meal

All Christians are welcome at the Lord's table. The bread is gluten-free. The cup is alcohol-free.
Those choosing not to commune may receive a blessing from the servers.

The Invitation to the Meal

L: Sisters and Brothers in Christ, this is the table where our Savior Jesus Christ wants to feed us on the bread of life. Let us feast on his grace that forgives us. Let us feast on his peace that calms us. Let us feast on his love that frees us. Come just as you are and be fed by him.

The Great Thanksgiving

L: The Lord be with you.

P: **And also with you.**

L: Lift up your hearts.

P: **We lift them up to the Lord.**

L: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

P: **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

L: It is right and good always and everywhere to give thanks...

The Words of Institution

L: We praise your name as we proclaim the mystery of faith...

All: **Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.**

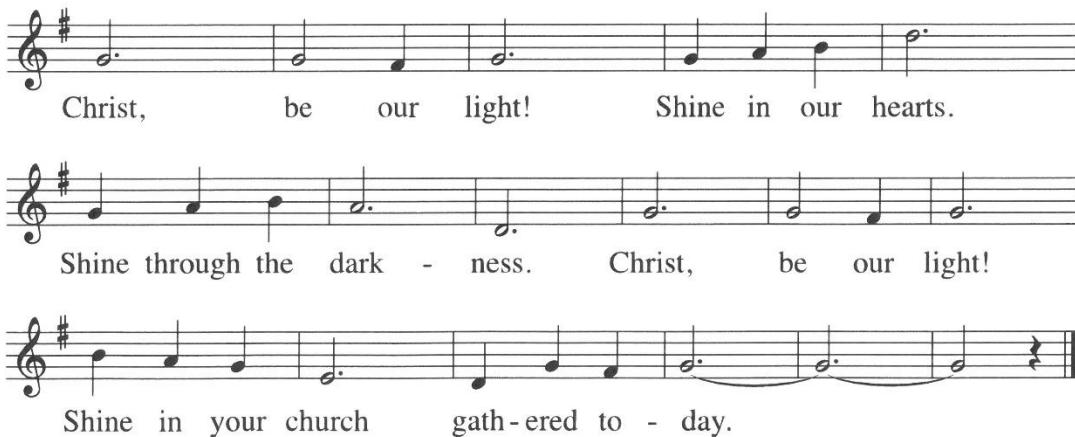
Prayer of Consecration

Distribution of the Elements

Hymns during the distribution of the elements:

Gather Us In
Blue #649

Christ Be Our Light
Congregation joins on refrain.



Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness. Christ, be our light!
Shine in your church gathered to day.

I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light

Blue #248

Prayer of Thanksgiving

All: We give you thanks, Almighty God, that you have refreshed us at your table by granting us the presence of Jesus Christ. Strengthen our faith, increase our love for one another, and send us forth into the world in courage and peace, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Proclaiming the Word

TIME WITH CHILDREN

Alex Plum

SONG (Children preschool through grade 8 leave for Sunday School.)

*He's got the whole world in his hands, He's got the whole wide world in his hands,
He's got the whole world in his hands, He's got the whole world in his hands.*

GOSPEL LESSON

Matthew 5:13-20

SERMON

Rev. Steve Kaehr

***HYMN**

You Are Salt for the Earth, O People

Black #181

***STATEMENT OF FAITH** (World Council of Churches)

I believe in the living God, the Maker of all humankind who creates and sustains the universe in power and in love.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God incarnate on earth, who showed us by his words and work, suffering with others, conquest of death, what human life ought to be and what God is like.

I believe that the Spirit of God is present with us now and always, and can be experienced in prayer, in forgiveness, in the Word, the Sacraments, the community of the Church and all that we do. Amen.

THE PRAYERS & LORD'S PRAYER (debts/debtors)

Lord in your mercy... **Hear our prayer.**

...Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

GATHERING OUR GIFTS

Holy is the Lord

Arr. by Wagner

Jubilee Ringers

*OFFERTORY



Let us bring ev - 'ry gift, let us trea - sure ev - 'ry grace: As you've giv - en to us, let us share.



In our neighbor to day we will meet you face to face, Let your love be the rule ev - 'ry - where.

*PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Holy God, with great joy we offer these gifts to you. You have blessed us richly and poured out your generosity and love on us without restraint. Bless these gifts and use them to spread your light and our light into the world. Amen.

Sending

*HYMN

I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me

Blue #574

*BLESSING

POSTLUDE

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Our guest preacher today is the Rev. Steve Kaehr. Steve is a retired United Methodist pastor who served as pastor at Spirit of Grace Church here in River Falls and chaplain with St. Croix Hospice for 9 years. Please welcome him warmly.

SUNDAY PARTICIPANTS

Preacher: Rev. Steve Kaehr
Celebrant: Rev. Steve Kaehr
Cantor: David Reilly
Liturgist: Sue Danielson
Deacons: Laura Anderson, Lance Lueck,
 Jena Most, Paul Shepherd
Organist: Marsha Pearson
Nursery: Kahla Fuller
Live Stream: Jeff Hoffman
Trustee: Tim Bylander
Coffee Fellowship: Endowment Grant Committee
Counters: Jane Truesdill, Vicki Sippel

CHURCH STAFF

Pastor: Christopher Myers
Education Pastor: Stacy Johnson Myers
Youth Minister: Alex Plum
Music Coordinator &
Bell Director: Jamie Mills
Choir Director: Sarah Plum
Organists: Terry Mithun,
 Marsha Pearson
Building Manager: Timothy Bylander
Church Moderator: Marie Roe
Office Administrator: Missy Luedtke
Nursery Attendant: Kahla Fuller
Custodians: Farnum Fuller,
 Troy Zakrzewski

Treasurer's Report

	<u>Feb 1, 2026</u>	<u>Year to Date</u>
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General Fund Income*	\$ 30,045	\$ 102,895
General Fund Operational Needs	\$ 11,308	\$ 56,540

A full accounting of all income and expenses is available in the church office.

*Includes annual and monthly gifts.



Offering QR Code

1. On your mobile device, open your Camera app or QR Code app
2. Point your camera at the QR Code
3. Click the tab 'Give Online'

Please remember the following in your prayers this week:

Those who are ill or recovering:

Barbara de Souza, Jeff Auchampach (nephew of Yvonne Benson), Glen Corliss (brother of Raelle Jorae), Eric (friend of Liz Swank), Emily Rognholt (sister of Missy Linaberry), Blake Friese, Barb Mahoney, Joyce Kampstra, Jim Larson,

Prayers for the ministry of our congregation:

- For our congregation as it met for its Annual Meeting on Sunday, February 1 and for our church leaders who guide us, may we faithfully celebrate our 2025 accomplishments and courageously plan for 2026
- For our pastors and musicians gearing up for Ash Wednesday, Lent and the Prayer Around the Cross worship services in the Fellowship Hall on Wednesdays at 6:30pm, may we come together to worship and pray
- For our choir and other local choirs gearing up for It Takes A Village concert on Sunday, February 22nd at 4pm at Ezekiel, may your voices bring hope and healing to the folks in Haiti (proceeds from the concert go to the village in Haiti sponsored by the churches of River Falls)
- For housing insecure folks in our community and those who met on Thursdays to plan a Tiny Home community, may you be innovative and courageous in your planning
- For our Back Bay Mission Team headed to Biloxi, MS over Spring Break, may you be the light of Jesus as you work there
- For Louise Schmahl (sister of Becky Pajac) as she continues dialysis

Prayers for our World:

- As we celebrate Valentine's Day this week let us remember the gift of love and those we love
- As we gather for the Winter Olympics may we remember the common bonds that bind us together
- For those in our church and community living in fear with recent immigration raids
- For people who work and live outside as we live through our coldest weeks of the year
- For those in treatment and rehab, may you be given strength for the journey
- For stability and peace in Venezuela, Gaza and Ukraine
- For all of us as we work to better care for the gift of God's good creation and reduce the effects of climate change
- For those living with dementia and families trying to care for them, may they all be given strength, grace and help along the way

Prayers of Thanksgiving:

- For our Trustees and their helpers who cleaned the inside of the church on Saturday, Jan 31, thank you!
- For our mid-winter experiment of Pizza and Salad for our Wednesday Night Meals—let's eat together
- For our church custodian Troy Zakrewski trying valiantly to keep our church floors clean from all the snow and ice melt, stay strong and thank you!
- For 10 years of generating clean solar energy with our church solar panels, thanks be to God!

For those grieving the loss of loved ones:

- For the family of Viola Joosten, grandmother of Sarah Plum who died recently and whose funeral will be Saturday, February 14th in Rudolph, Wisconsin, may God strengthen you
- For the family of Dick Taylor, brother of Yvonne Benson who died recently, may you mourn with gratitude
- For the families of Jane Webb (Greenwood Teacher), Cody Peterson (RF Fire Department), Wanell Hansen (mother of Jill Paulson), JoAnn Lentz and Jim Filkins, may they be comforted

If you have people you wish to include on our prayer list, please contact the church office or one of the pastors.

Sunday, February 8, 2026

Loving God

New to Church: Are you a first-time visitor? Please stop at the welcome table in the gathering area to receive a special welcome gift from us!

Sunday Morning Bible Study: Please join us on Sunday mornings to discuss the Bible passages used in worship. The group meets from **9:00–9:50** in the Youth Room. For more information, contact Pastor Stacy.

Wednesday Afternoon Bible Study: The group is discussing Matthew Skinner's *Acts: Catching Up with the Spirit*. Copies of the book are available in the church office for \$16.00 each. The group meets in the library on **Wednesdays, 1:00–2:30 pm**. If you have questions, contact Pastor Stacy.

Ash Wednesday & Evening Lenten Worship: Ash Wednesday worship will be on Wed, Feb 18, 6:30-7:30 pm. Throughout Lent, we will gather together on Wednesday evenings for simple Prayer Around the Cross services. Wednesday Evening Worship will be on Wednesdays Feb 25, Mar 4, 11, 18 and 25. Please plan to attend!

Loving Neighbor

First Church Companions: Are you interested in being a companion to someone in our church connecting with them at least once a month with a call or visit? Or would you like to have someone for a companion. Please use the sign-up sheet to be a companion or request someone to visit you.

Basics for Local Kids: Volunteers are needed. You can help families shop or you can help sort, restock or organize winter wear. Shifts are usually 2 hours. To sign up, go to <https://www.basicsforlocalkids.org/> or call Kim at 715-821-1623. Contact Renee Whipple at 715-307-5074 if you have any questions.

Grace Place is a homeless shelter run by the Salvation Army in New Richmond. It is housed in the old St. Croix County Nursing Home. They operate on a short shoe-string budget and are delighted that we will support them with donations and meals. The shelter has three family rooms, a men's wing and a women's wing. They can house up to 50 people, two or three people to a room. If you have any questions, please see Carole Mottaz.

Grace Place Donations: Needed items: **Sidewalk salt (urgent need)**, new adult undergarments (underwear up to size XXL), new bras, thermal underwear (up to size XXL), new or like-new sweatpants up to size 4X, new or like-new T-shirts up to size 4X, new shoes (adult men and female), belts, adult socks, new or like-new winter coats, adult gloves, good buys. There is a bin at church for donations.

Empty Pill Bottles (Prescription Only): The River Falls Lions Club is collecting empty pill bottles, only the clear prescription bottles that are filled by our pharmacists, to send to Africa where there is an urgent need. The bottles will be washed, and the labels soaked off before they are shipped. A tub is in the gathering area.

Among Friends is a community-based social respite program serving adults who have memory loss who reside in Pierce & St. Croix Counties. For more information, call (715) 293-2561. Check out the website: amongfriendsrf.com & Facebook. It is held at church **Tuesdays & Thursdays 9am to 3pm**.

Loving Self

Creative Prayer Flow—Thurs, Feb 19, 6:30-8:00 pm: The workshop will be lead by Carrie Windett MA, ATR-BC, LPCC, Be Still Art + Healing, LLC. In this workshop, you'll explore Sensorimotor Art Therapy's guided drawing's three resourcing movements before moving into a time of watercolor play; an invitation for joy and connection. The experience will conclude with reflections on Christ-centered truths and witnessing others. No artistic experience is required - just open hands and a willing heart to try. The group will meet in the youth room. Please sign up & join us.

Merry Widows: They will meet on **Friday, February 20, at 1:00 pm at The Sycamore in River Falls.** They will have pizza and dessert for lunch. All widows are welcome to join us for dinner and conversation! See Linda Morrow for more information.

Men's Group: Our church men's group meets **every other Tuesday from 9:00-10:00 am** in the Youth Room. All men are welcome to join us for coffee, donuts & lively conversation. Our next meetings are **Feb 17 & Mar 3.**

Women's Group: Interested in fellowship & community with other women? You are invited to join the group at noon every 2nd & 4th Tuesday. Please bring a lunch. The next meetings will be **Feb 10 & 24.**

Let's Knit/Craft Together: Join us on **Thursdays at 10:00 am. We meet at Sycamore on the first Thursday of each month & the Fellowship Hall the other Thursdays.** We have a great time sharing our projects & enjoying each other's company. For more info, contact Marie Roe at 715-781-2103 or firstroe@gmail.com

Church Yoga: The church yoga group meets on **Tuesdays and Thursdays** in the church Fellowship Hall from **9:00-10:00 am** and via Zoom. Please contact the church office to receive the Zoom link.

Game Day Sunday: Game Day Sunday is held on the third Sunday of the month. Our next Game Day is **February 15 with a new time of 11:45 am.** Join us!

WISE Team: NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) Family Support Group meets the 2nd & 4th Thursdays 6:30pm at 113 East Elm St & Peer Support Group meets the same evenings at First Congregational at 6:30pm. The WISE Team meets the first Tuesday of the month at 6:30pm. For info, call Marg Downing at 715-307-5905.

Community Life

Pizza Party: Until our full Wednesday Night Family Meals resume on Ash Wednesday, Feb 18, we will hold a Pizza Party on Wednesday night from 5:15 to 6:00 pm in the Fellowship Hall. Salad, fruit & drinks will also be served. When you sign up, suggest pizza toppings & we will do our best to accommodate. Normal pricing of \$9 per person/family max of \$30. Join us!

Church Family Fused Glass Project: During Lent, members of our church family are invited to work together to create a large fused glass piece of art that will hang by the main stairwell. The theme of the piece will be Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Artists will learn to cut and arrange glass pieces to create the design. Once the art is complete, it will be fused in a glass kiln and then hung on the wall. Please watch for workshop times.

Relay for Life Soup Night: Once again the Relay for Life team will have its annual Soup Night to raise money for Relay for Life. Our **Soup Night is March 18 from 5:15-6:00 pm** in the Fellowship Hall. The cost of the meal is a donation of \$9/person or \$30/family as with other Wednesday night meals. There will be a variety of soups, some fruit, & dessert. You can sample/eat as many of the soups as you like.

The **Relay for Life Event is Fri, April 10** beginning at 5:00 pm at the River Falls High School gym. The theme this year is "We are the World, United for a Cure." It will have many opportunities to participate in the event with teams selling items, selling luminaries, and the silent auction. Please plan to participate or help our church's team raise money for the fundraiser. If you have questions or would like to join our team, contact Deb Hoffman at dehoffman234b@gmail.com or (612)308-4945.

Name Tags: We encourage you to wear your name tags so that everyone can call you by name. It would also help the deacons when you take communion. If you do not have one, please let Missy in the church office know at missy@firstchurchrf.org. In appreciation, the Welcoming Committee.



Join our 20th Anniversary Ecumenical Fundraising Concert for a memorable night of music supporting vital projects in Ganthier, Haiti.

It Takes a Village

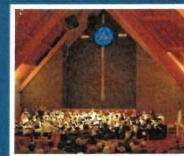
Sunday, February 22 at 4:00 pm

Ezekiel Lutheran Church

202 South 2nd St. | River Falls, WI

A free-will offering will be collected to support the school, orphanage, and health center—bringing hope and lasting impact.

A dessert reception will follow the concert.



Featuring: Croix Chordsmen Chorus, Cross Lutheran Choir (Roberts), Ezekiel's Chancel Choir, First Congregational Church Choir, Pierce County Ecumenical, UWRF-University Community Chorus, and a mass choir number

Learn more about this nonprofit at HaitianRelief.org

SCRIPTURE LESSON: Isaiah 58:6-9a

Is not this the fast that I choose:

 to loose the bonds of injustice,

 to undo the thongs of the yoke,

to let the oppressed go free,

 and to break every yoke?

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,

 and bring the homeless poor into your house;

when you see the naked, to cover them,

 and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,

 and your healing shall spring up quickly;

your vindicator shall go before you,

 the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.

Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;

 you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.

GOSPEL LESSON: Matthew 5:13-20

‘You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled underfoot.

‘You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all 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 in heaven.

‘Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.