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Be the Light: Dare to be Different

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> Matthew 5:16 – “Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”
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> Daniel 3:16–30; Psalm 119:9–16; Philippians 2:14–16; Matthew 5:13–16

World Sunday School Sunday

Today, as we celebrate World Sunday School Sunday, we gather to remember the importance of teaching God's Word to children and nurturing the faith of the next generation. Our theme, “Be the Light: Dare to Be Different,” challenges us to live as followers of Jesus in a world where people often choose the easiest path rather than the right path. We live in a world that constantly tells children and young people to follow the crowd, seek popularity, and measure success by possessions, achievements, and social recognition. Yet Jesus calls His disciples to a different way of life. He declares in Matthew 5:14, “You are the light of the world.” Notice that Jesus does not merely say that we should try to become light. He tells us that, as His disciples, we are called to reflect His light in the world. What does it mean to be different? It does not mean being proud, disrespectful, or isolated from society. It means having the courage to stand for truth, practise kindness, reject wrongdoing, and follow Christ even when others choose a different path. This is precisely where Sunday School becomes important. Sunday School is not merely a place where children memorise Bible verses, sing songs, and participate in competitions. It is a ministry through which the Church forms Christian character, develops spiritual understanding, and prepares children to become faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. Let us reflect on three important lessons from today's Scripture readings.

1. Dare to Stand for God: The Courage to Be Different

Daniel 3:16–30 introduces us to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, three young Jewish men who refused to worship the golden image erected by King Nebuchadnezzar. The king commanded everyone to bow down before the image, threatening to throw those who disobeyed into a blazing furnace. These young men faced a difficult choice: obey the king and compromise their faith, or remain faithful to God and face the consequences. Their response was remarkable. They declared that their God was able to deliver them, but even if He did not, they would not worship the golden image. Their faith was not dependent on the promise of an easy life. They were prepared to remain faithful even when the outcome was uncertain. This is what it means to dare to be different. Sometimes children face pressure from friends to lie, cheat in examinations, bully others, or participate in activities they know are wrong. Young people may feel that they must compromise their values to be accepted. Adults, too, face similar temptations in workplaces, communities, and public life. The example of these three young men reminds us that faithfulness to God is more important than the approval of others.

How can we nurture such courage in our children? We must teach them that their identity is rooted in Christ, not in popularity or public opinion. They need to learn that doing what is right may not always be easy, but it is always worth doing. Here lies the responsibility of Sunday School teachers. They are not merely instructors who explain biblical stories; they are spiritual guides who help children connect biblical truths with everyday life. When children learn about Daniel, Esther, Joseph, and the disciples of Jesus, they should also learn how to live courageously in their own schools, homes, and communities. Sunday School must become a place where children discover that God is trustworthy, prayer is meaningful, and obedience to Christ is a lifelong commitment. The three young men in Daniel's story were not abandoned in the furnace. God was with them in their suffering. Their experience reminds us that faith does not guarantee freedom from every difficulty, but God remains faithful to His people. The Church grows stronger when it raises a generation that chooses faithfulness over fear, integrity over popularity, and Christ over compromise.

2. Grow Through God's Word: The Foundation of Christian Character

Our second reading, Psalm 119:9-16, asks an important question: "How can a young person stay on the path of purity?" The answer is found in the Word of God. The psalmist speaks about seeking God wholeheartedly, hiding His Word in the heart, meditating on His precepts, and delighting in His statutes. This passage reminds us that spiritual growth does not happen accidentally. It requires intentional teaching, regular engagement with Scripture, prayer, and a desire to know God's will. Children today are growing up in a rapidly changing world. They have access to enormous amounts of information through television, the internet, mobile phones, and social media. Some of this information can be useful, but other influences may weaken their values, distort their understanding of relationships, and distract them from God. Therefore, the Church must provide children with a strong biblical foundation. Sunday School offers an opportunity to introduce them to the story of God's relationship with humanity, the life and teachings of Jesus, the meaning of salvation, and the call to love God and neighbour.

Historically, the Sunday School movement developed significantly in eighteenth-century England. Robert Raikes, a newspaper publisher and philanthropist in Gloucester, is widely recognised for his pioneering work in promoting Sunday Schools from 1780. He sought to provide education and moral instruction to children, particularly those from poor working-class families who had limited opportunities for formal schooling. These early schools commonly operated on Sundays and included reading, writing, and biblical instruction. Over time, Sunday Schools spread to many parts of the world and became an important ministry of Christian churches. In India, Christian missions and churches also used Sunday School education to teach children the Bible, nurture Christian faith, and develop literacy and moral understanding. Today, Sunday School continues to serve a vital purpose, although its mission must respond to the needs and challenges of contemporary children. Its primary purpose is not simply to preserve an institution or continue a tradition. It is to help children know Jesus Christ, understand Scripture, grow in faith, and live out the Gospel. Sunday School teachers, therefore, have a sacred responsibility. They must prepare their lessons prayerfully, teach with patience, welcome children's questions, and make biblical teaching meaningful. Children should feel safe to express their doubts, share their experiences, and discover how God's

Word speaks to their lives. Parents also have an essential role. Sunday School cannot replace the spiritual influence of the home. When parents pray with their children, read Scripture together, demonstrate forgiveness, and practise Christian love, they reinforce what children learn at church. The Church must also invest in teacher training, appropriate learning materials, creative activities, and pastoral care. A Sunday School that merely occupies children for an hour may entertain them, but a Sunday School that teaches, loves, guides, and disciples them can shape their lives. The future strength of the Church depends not only on the number of children attending Sunday School today, but also on the depth of their relationship with Christ tomorrow.

3. Shine for Christ: Become a Witness to the World

In Matthew 5:13–16, Jesus describes His disciples as the salt of the earth and the light of the world. In Philippians 2:14–16, Paul encourages believers to do everything without grumbling or arguing so that they may shine like stars in a dark world as they hold firmly to the word of life. Both passages remind us that Christian faith must be visible through our conduct. Jesus says in Matthew 5:16, "Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." Our light is not meant to draw attention to ourselves. It is meant to point people towards God. We shine when we forgive someone who has hurt us, help a person in need, speak truthfully, respect those who are different from us, and stand beside people who are neglected or excluded. For children, shining their light may mean refusing to bully a classmate, welcoming a new student, sharing with someone in need, or standing up for a friend who is treated unfairly. For adults, it may mean practising honesty, resisting corruption, caring for vulnerable people, and demonstrating compassion in public life. Sunday School must prepare children not only to attend church but also to become witnesses for Christ wherever they go. The classroom should be a training ground for Christian living, and the lessons learned there should find expression in homes, schools, neighbourhoods, and society. This also challenges the Church to examine its own witness. We cannot teach children to love while displaying hatred, teach forgiveness while nurturing bitterness, or teach honesty while tolerating dishonesty. Children learn from what we say, but they are often shaped even more deeply by what they see. Therefore, ministers, Sunday School teachers, parents, and church leaders must work together. The Church should honour its teachers, support its Sunday School ministry, encourage children to participate in worship and service, and provide opportunities for them to use their gifts. We must remember that children are not merely the future of the Church; they are an important part of the Church today. Their questions, prayers, enthusiasm, creativity, and faith enrich the whole Christian community. When children become disciples who shine for Christ, they influence their families, encourage their friends, and contribute to the growth of the Church. Such growth is not measured only by buildings, attendance, or finances. It is also measured by transformed lives, deeper faith, loving relationships, and faithful Christian witness.

Conclusion

Dear brothers and sisters, on this World Sunday School Sunday, God's Word calls us to a renewed commitment. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego teach us to dare to stand for God even when it is difficult. Psalm 119 reminds us to build our lives on the Word of God. Philippians

2 calls us to shine like stars in the world, while Jesus commands us to let our light shine so that others may glorify our heavenly Father. These lessons reveal the importance of Sunday School in the life and growth of the Church. It is a ministry of teaching, character formation, discipleship, and mission. Through faithful Sunday School ministry, the Church invests in children who can grow into mature believers and responsible servants of Christ. Let us ask ourselves: Are we giving our children a faith that can withstand the pressures of the world? Are we supporting our Sunday School teachers? Are our homes and churches helping children encounter Jesus personally? Are we preparing them to become lights in their generation? Let us renew our commitment to this precious ministry. Let parents become partners in Christian education, teachers become faithful mentors, church leaders become enthusiastic supporters, and children become courageous disciples of Jesus. Dear children, remember that you do not need to be the most popular, the richest, or the strongest to make a difference. You can shine through kindness, honesty, courage, prayer, and love. Wherever God places you, let the light of Jesus shine through your life. May our Sunday Schools become places where faith is nurtured, character is formed, disciples are equipped, and future leaders are prepared. May our churches grow not merely in numbers but in spiritual maturity and Christlike service. Let us be the light. Let us dare to be different. And let us raise a generation that shines for Jesus Christ, bringing hope to the world and glory to God. Amen.