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Redwoods Presbyterian Church  
Larkspur, California  
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Isaiah 58:1-9a; Matthew 5: 13-20  
“Salt of the Earth and Light of the World”

Florence Nightingale was the daughter of a wealthy landowner in the mid-1800s England and was uncomfortable with her lady-like upbringing.

She was surrounded by golf courses and servants and grandeur, royalty, operas and luxury and was expected to enjoy a life of leisure and when the time was right get married. If you watched Masterpiece Theater's Downton Abby you get the picture. When Florence was married she would be the lady of an estate, supervise servants, and host tea parties and banquets. Florence wanted none of that.

Many of her women friends had the education of the upper class that got them by while their brothers went on to schools of higher learning to prepare for industry, parliament or the Foreign Service. Florence was lucky. Her father believed that girls should be educated so he personally taught his two daughters philosophy, classical languages, history, mathematics and science.

As a gifted student and a caring personality Florence focused on medicine and *nursing* much to the consternation of her parents, William and Frances and sister Parthenope. Nurses in the day were morally lax and disorganized. This did not stop Florence. She envisioned nursing as a noble profession and she would make it so.

Jesus' words inspired her:

“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 under foot.

“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 lamp stand, 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.”

At age seventeen Florence was convinced that God was calling her to be a nurse. She was a Nightingale and nightingales, the birds, are named so because they frequently sing at night as well as during the day. Its

song is noticed at night because few other birds are singing. Florence was that singer in the night.

She put her heart and soul into educating herself in medicine and nursing and taught other women. She trained them to be nurses.

Florence persisted while her parents resisted. What would nursing do to Florence's reputation they thought? They sent her on overseas trips to attract suitors and to distract her from her wild notions of nursing. Thirteen years after God first called her Florence heard God's voice again during a trip along the Nile in Egypt. She wrote to her sister: "God called me in the morning and asked me would I do good for him alone without reputation."

Nothing would stop her now. Her father relented and sent her to a Lutheran community in Germany where the pastor and women deacons ministered to the sick and the deprived. Florence regarded this as a turning point in her life. Three years later she became the superintendent of the Care of Sick Gentlewomen in London and was paid an annual stipend by her kind father. He saw the light.

Florence continued to teach women to become nurses. A year later news came to England from the Crimean War south of Russia of the horrific medical conditions of wounded soldiers. It was a terrible war, fought with sword, gun and canon, from horse back and trench. Soldiers clashed in face-to-face combat. The wounded were carried in mounds to makeshift medical barracks which reeked of sickness and death.

Florence saw her mission. This was her moment and time. Her family had connections in high places and Florence volunteered to care for the wounded in Crimea with a team of nurses she had trained. Her request was granted and she left England on October 21, 1854 with 38 nurses.

She arrived at barracks in Scutari (modern-day Üsküdar in Istanbul) and found wounded soldiers being badly cared for by overworked medical staff in the face of official indifference. Medicines were in short supply, hygiene was neglected, and mass infections were common, many of them fatal. There was no equipment to process food for the patients.

During her first winter at Scutari, 4,077 soldiers died there. Ten times more soldiers died from illnesses such as typhus, typhoid, cholera and dysentery than from battle wounds. Conditions at the temporary barracks hospital were fatal to the patients because of overcrowding and the hospital's defective sewers and lack of ventilation. Imagine working in these conditions.

“You are the salt of the earth.” Rattle some cages. Florence did and a Sanitary Commission was sent out by the British government to Scutari, almost six months after Florence had arrived, and flushed out the sewers and improved ventilation. Death rates were sharply reduced.

Florence opened windows for fresh air to blow through the rooms and to let in God’s healing light. She would be that light at night. The nightingale would be heard in Scutari. When all had gone to bed Florence walked among soldiers with her lamp and offered words of comfort and encouragement.

She gained the nickname "The Lady with the Lamp", derived from a phrase in *The Times* of London: “She is a ‘ministering angel’ without any exaggeration in these hospitals, and as her slender form glides quietly along each corridor, every poor fellow's face softens with gratitude at the sight of her. When all the medical officers have retired for the night and silence and darkness have settled down upon those miles of prostrate sick, she may be observed alone, with a little lamp in her hand, making her solitary rounds.”

Poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow would write:

“Lo! in that house of misery  
A lady with a lamp I see  
Pass through the glimmering gloom,  
And flit from room to room.”

- (Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in "Santa Filomena," 1857)

You are the light of the world...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to God in heaven.

Florence was the first to admit that her light was God’s light and her stamina, will and intellect was God’s gift to her. Her concern and advocacy for better nursing in the Balkans and back home was the biblical salt of the earth.

She championed the cause that death rates were largely due to poor nutrition and supplies and overworking soldiers. Back in England she collected evidence for the Royal Commission on the Health of the Army to prove that most of the soldiers at the hospital were killed by poor living conditions.

The application of statistics was her strong suit and she showed that patients in London hospitals died at a rate of 90% while those sick that did not go to hospital died at a rate of 60% and she turned her attention to the sanitary design of hospitals.

She was among the first to use pie charts for presentations and was the first woman to be admitted to the Royal Statistical Society. She is famously quoted as saying: "To understand God's thoughts we must study statistics, for these are the measure of God's purpose."

Nursing is a valuable and valid profession because a seventeen year old girl faithfully lived into her calling to be salt of the earth and light of the world. It's encouraging that the pioneer of modern nursing was called to her work by God. God calls each of us to be salt of the earth and light of the world...and we are! Amen.