

Be These
Encounters With Jesus in Epiphany
Matthew 5:13-20
5th Sunday After the Epiphany
February 9, 2020
Pastor Dea Sharp, Pikes Peak UMC

Matthew 5:13-20 (NRSV)

Salt and Light

¹³ “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.

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ 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.

The Law and the Prophets

¹⁷ “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. ¹⁸ For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter,^[a] not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore, whoever breaks^[b] 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. ²⁰ For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

When Pastor Gene and I were on our river cruise in Europe a couple of years ago, we had an excursion day in Passau, Austria. Passau is where we listened to an organ recital in St. Stephen’s Cathedral and I was moved to goosebumps and tears. The setting was awesome, the organ is the largest in Europe, but the music – that was God!

Passau also has a salt museum with displays of the history of the salt trade in the region. In Bavaria, there are mines where salt has been extracted since the late 1100’s.

Salt has been called “white gold” throughout history for it’s value as a preservative and as currency. The word “salary” comes from a Latin word that refers to the payments made to Roman soldiers for their services.

Salt is pretty valuable stuff!

And today, I want to focus on the first part of the Scripture reading, the part about salt and light.

We're still in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and Jesus calls his audience (that's us) salt – that WE are that value commodity.

How are we like salt?

There are several ways, actually!

One way is that salt is a preservative.

It's rubbed on meats and used in canning to stop or, at least, slow decay.

When Jesus calls us to be the "salt of the earth" he's calling us to slow AND stop the decay of the world.

We're called to preserve the Gospel.

Another meaning of preserve is to protect or defend.

So a second way we're the "salt" is when we defend ourselves and each other from false teachings; when we protect the integrity of being followers of Jesus Christ against distortions.

A third purpose of salt is to flavor food.

Now, on the advice of our doctors, we're careful but salt DOES make food more appealing.

Some people aren't interested in the gospel. So, Salt of the Earth, Dear Ones, WE can help make the gospel more appealing and show how flavorful our lives are – and theirs COULD be - when THEY come to know Jesus.

And, finally, for today, salt also makes people (and animals) thirsty.

As I prepared for today, I remember the old saying, "you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink." But, I didn't know there was a second part to the saying: Can't make him drink but "you can put salt in his oats."

We're the salt.

And we are called for God's purpose to encourage others to be thirsty for the Living Water, Jesus Christ.

...BE THE SALT IN THEIR OATS!

This applies in every facet of our lives.

At work...or at a game board.

We're supposed to be appealing in our behavior and draw people to God by our example and making the teachings about Jesus something they thirst for.

There's a story about a business owner who employed many Christians in his company.

He watched them and was able to say, "You know, I was naturally drawn to God by observing those Christian workers. They were conscientious and kind and thorough."

But, something else *really* impressed the owner.

One day a guy the owner knew had just accepted Jesus, asked to see him. The owner agreed but then thought the guy might be coming to try to convert him.

The owner was surprised when the employee came into the office and asked for forgiveness. He admitted that over the years he'd "borrowed" company products here and there. He'd taken supplies and cheated the time clock. But, the man said, "now, I've become a Christian and it's real." He told the owner that in gratitude for what Christ had done for him, he wanted to make amends to the owner for the wrongs he'd done.

He was truly sorry and wanted to figure out a way to clear things up. He understood he could be fired...or maybe his pay docked -...whatever! He told the owner, "I just want to make things right with God and between us."

Well, the owner said that THAT conversation made more of a spiritual impact on him than anything else ever had.

He had witnessed a demonstration of part of what being a Christian is about.

He had witnessed someone who was the salt of the earth.

But, we have to be careful.

We can't become too prideful saying "I behave well at work" 'cause salt can lose its saltiness.

A man named Henry Maundrell was an Anglican pastor who died in 1701. He journalled about his travels to Jerusalem and one entry noted a place, south of the Dead Sea, known as the Valley of Salt – which could be where Lot’s wife’s pillar of salt is.

Rev. Maundrell noticed an outcropping of salt and broke off a piece that had been exposed to the weather. Even though it had the sparkle of some salt, it had, when he tasted it, completely lost its flavor. But, the part still connected to the rock had, he said, “retained its savor.”

That’s the formula for us as well.

We have to stay connected to the rock, our “rock and our Redeemer” it says in the psalms, WHO is Christ so that we won’t lose our saltiness.

That can happen if we ignore the beatitudes that Jesus gave us last Sunday...by not working at those attributes.

We, too, can become unsalted when we fall into sin.

Jesus says in Mark’s gospel to cut off the parts that cause us to sin.

One commentary said, “Its better to cut if off and enter Heaven than keep a hold of it and be thrown into Hell.”

That kinda sums it up, eh? Don’t lose the saltiness with sin.

And don’t lose it by giving up either! We’ve got to persevere in our journey to follow Jesus. Losing our saltiness can cause us to lose our effectiveness. Salt that loses its flavor needs to be thrown out, “trampled under foot” Jesus says in today’s reading. We DON’T want THAT!

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In the next sentence Jesus jumps into another analogy that of being the “light of the world...and to let our light shine before others.”

In John’s gospel (8:12) – and we hinted at this with our Call to Worship earlier – Jesus said that HE was the light of the world.

Now WE’RE the light?

Which is it?

Well, make NO mistake, Jesus is the true light of the world.

BUT: he gives us **his** light which makes **us** the light of the world.

We don't have our own light but WE ARE reflectors.

You and I, we "REFLECT HIS GLORY" – I tell you that every Sunday.

We're kind of moons who and reflect the Son. (S.O.N.)

So, how brightly do we shine?

How well do we show others that we are disciples of Jesus?

Sometimes when I'm here, midweek, when no one else is around, I sit in the sanctuary to be quiet.

In the afternoon, when the sun is coming through these windows behind me, I've thought about that (I think I told you during our Anniversary sermons) story of a boy who toured the cathedrals in Europe with his parents.

Like me, impressed with the images that come through our stained glass windows, the boy was impressed by the stained glass portraits of saints he'd seen.

When he got home, his Sunday school teacher asked what he liked the most.

He said, "I loved the stained glass images of the saints."

Curious, the teacher asked, "What's a saint?"

When the boy thought back to the beautiful windows he said, "A saint is a person the light shines through."

That's a good definition of what a saint of God is supposed to be.

We're supposed to let the light of Jesus shine through us to the world – it sure could use it!

And Jesus goes on.

The "*light cannot be hidden*"!

We've got to BE the purpose for which the light is in us.

We've got to be exposed and to stand out – we're being given permission to draw attention, in a good way, so that our influence can be talked about and spread far and wide – and others will know that we ARE followers of Jesus Christ.

//Now, Jesus talking about lighting a light and putting a bowl over it sounds absurd, doesn't it? Who lights a lamp (especially if there's flame) and then covers it up?

Like Jesus said, **“no one...”**

But that's what we tend to do, sometimes, as Christians.

Listen: God placed God's light in us for a purpose - to shine for THAT purpose...don't hide it!

Further along in the Sermon on the Mount (it's a couple more weeks in the lectionary) Jesus reminds us not to store up “things” – but to store up treasures in Heaven.

He also reminds us about serving two masters – that's in the “money” part of his teaching...we can't serve both God and money. Remember those? They're a couple of the things that can cause us to stumble on our walks.

Listen: if we have the light of Christ and allow something (anything) to hide that light; if we allow darkness to overshadow the light – whoa, it gets dark!

It's one thing, for folks who don't know Jesus yet, to have nothing but darkness in them.

But IT. IS. WORSE to have the light of Christ in us and, instead of letting it shine through, we let the darkness of the world overshadow it.

We're going to sing “This Little Light of Mine” in a couple minutes. I remember singing it in VBS and getting to the part about hiding it under a bushel and shouting NO!

Kids love to shout it, right?

We should ALL be like that – especially if we're shouting about Jesus!

Are we going to allow a bushel of pride, or envy, or addiction to hide our light?

NO!

What about materialism or busy-ness?

NO!

What? NO!

Because –

Just like salt can lose its saltiness due to being weathered and not protected by The Rock, what happens when you cover a candle (or lamp)?

It goes out.

The fire, the light, needs JUST LIKE US, an oxygen supply or WE will die out.

When we smother OUR reflection-of-Jesus-light with worldly things, we will be overcome by darkness.

In the epistle letter to the Thessalonians (1 Thes. 5:19) we're told NOT to quench the Spirit's fire.

Well, get this: Satan's got the hose; God's got the wood.

We need to make the right choice so our fire, our light, doesn't die down.

We've gotta keep some embers burning.

And sometimes that means that God needs to get out the poker and stir up the embers and rekindle the flame in us.

Painful sometimes, darn tootin', but take those opportunities, that we all should notice, to grow and keep your light burning bright.

What flickers CAN come back, we just can't be snuffed out.

'Cause Jesus wants us to shine.

And finally, for today....

Be sure that the shining we are doing – and I count on you to keep me accountable as I pray you ask me to be as well...

...that *any shining we're doing is NOT for our own glory* but for God's!

“So,” Jesus said, “*that they may see your good deeds and GIVE GLORY TO GOD IN HEAVEN.*”

Why?

Because we're the chosen, called-for-a-purpose sons and daughters of God. God called us out of the tasteless and dark world and into God's warm and wonderful light.

We have been set free from the gloom of sin and are blessed to live, by God's grace, in freedom!

Our response HAS TO BE to move through the darkness and STAY in the light.

We have been called out to stand out.

The reason we are to be salty and bright is so our lives will influence the world for Jesus. It's about being used to help bring people to know Jesus, who is THE LOVE of God incarnate.

We need to be the salt and light for the glory of God.

Amen?

Amen!