**February 9, 2020 Matthew 5:13-20**

***Salt & Light***

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:13-20 NRSV

*(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. (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, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. (19)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. (20)For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*

**Notes:**

1. We are all ***salt***.
   1. Salt was of great ***value*** in the ancient world.
   2. Salt is a pretty ***amazing*** thing when it is used.
   3. We have a ***responsibility*** in God’s kingdom.
   4. Salt is ***secondary***, it draws attention to something else.
2. We are all ***light***.
   1. Light, like salt, is pretty ***amazing***.
   2. Shine the light so others see the ***way*** ***of*** ***God*** and ***to*** ***God***.
   3. Salt and light are useful when they ***enhance*** something.
   4. We fulfill our role when we ***illuminate*** Christ.
3. The call to discipleship commands ***obedience*** to the law and teachings of the prophets.
   1. Jesus come to fulfill the law and give them ***meaning***.
   2. Jesus is telling us what it means to be his ***disciple***.
   3. When we coast, we lose our ***flavor*** and hide our ***light***.
4. The Christian walk is a walk of ***maturity*** and an increase in ***responsibility***.
   1. You are called to be salt and light to the ***world***.
   2. ***Commit*** to being salt and light.
   3. ***Commit*** to the One who calls us to this joyous responsibility.

**Transcript:**

Do you remember when you were a kid, how much you just couldn't wait to grow up? I mean, there were those milestones we all looked forward to, those times when we were certain that if we could just reach that magical age, we'd be as happy as we could ever dream. I may have mentioned this before; but I remember when I was 7, I couldn’t wait to play baseball. As a preteen years, I wanted to hunt, I thought I would die before getting the opportunity. Then in my early teen years how much I looked forward to turning sixteen. I was afraid that the world was going to come to an end before I had a chance; afraid I would have missed out on getting my drivers license; miss out on getting to drive a car and enjoying the freedom it brings; experience the freedom that came with the open road. I couldn't wait to turn sixteen, to take that driver's test, to receive the card with my name on it in the mail, back then we didn’t have pictures; a card that said to the world, I was able to driver, I was *almost* an adult.

I turned sixteen in the year 1979, in fact I remember the day it came. I was on the football team and we were on a Bollman’s bus, heading to Beaver Falls for a football game against Kennedy Christian Academy; we lost that game badly. So my wait was extended a few more days.

I remember praying that I would see 16, that God would wait and I'd be eternally grateful; I may have even promised to do whatever God wanted me to do, so I could experience life behind the wheel. Most of us have made irrational bargains like this with the Lord in our life. You see, I just wanted to drive. It seems God heard my prayer and did put off the apocalypse and you're welcome for that. 1979 came and went: I turned sixteen and after driving 2 months with supervision, I took the driving test and got my driver's license.

However, I didn't have this great, emancipation experience that I had hoped for. I worked odd jobs around Pleasantville, mowing yards and shovel sidewalks, at the bank in Pleasantville and for neighbors. I also worked on cars with dad, doing body work on cars for money to get my car someday. I worked so I could have a car, so I could work, so I could have a car. I quickly found out that being able to drive meant other responsibilities; like take my sisters places they needed to go, driving my Uncle Fred around since he had lost his license the summer before. It didn't take long for me to figure out, what I had once thought was this liberating life goal was in fact a mile marker of maturity and an increase in responsibility.

As followers of Christ, I'm afraid we get caught up in this way of thinking more often than we realize. Sometimes we get swept up in the notion that there are plateaus along the journey of discipleship, places where things level off and it seems we’ve been working so hard for the Lord, that we deserve a break. So when we reach this place where everything seems to be flowing well, we take a break, we can rest, because we've arrived at a place where God will bless us and encourage us. But if we take a break too long we begin to think we've made it. We begin to coast, put life in cruise control, live on autopilot, and just wait on eternity. We become spectators, instead of active participants in the ministry of God.

But then...well, then we hear words from Jesus. Words that call us to a deeper, more mature faith. Words from Jesus that call us to more responsibility in the kingdom of God. We find such words in our sermon passage today; words that serve as a great example from Christ's Sermon on the Mount in the fifth chapter of Matthew's gospel. Would you turn with me as we share in the reading of God’s Word, Matthew 5:13-20

(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. (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, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. (19)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. (20)For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:13-20 NRSV

The opening words of the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes, these opening words of the Beatitudes are encouraging. They are words that speak of blessings, especially upon those who aren't so used to being blessed. However, verse 13 shifts the sermon into a different gear. Jesus says, “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.”

Salt. We are all salt. If you think about it, salt really is an amazing mineral. It enhances the flavor of our favorite foods, acts as a preservative, melts the ice on frozen steps and frozen roads. Salt was of such great value in the ancient world that it was sometimes used as currency. In fact, the word "salary" comes from the practice of paying a worker with salt. Salt is a pretty amazing thing when it is used; but when it isn't used, when it's just salt, or when it has somehow lost its taste, it isn't much good for anything. In fact, salt by itself can be quite terrible, even corrosive.

Being the "salt of the earth" implies that we have some function to perform, some responsibility in this kingdom of which Jesus speaks. Being the salt of the earth isn't about being something great and wonderful on our own; no, it's about being the ones who bring out the great and wonderful things of God's kingdom to others. Salt is secondary but it is in service to something else. Have you ever eaten watermelon? Did you put salt on it to make it taste better? After you were finished eating it, you never hear anybody say that salt tasted really good. Nope they comment on how good the watermelon was but never comment on the salt. That is because the salt is there to draw attention to the watermelon, or whatever other food you are eating.

Now, if Jesus' salt metaphor in verse 13 is a little confusing, I think he clears things up pretty well in the three verses that follow. He says, “*You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. 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.*

Light. We are light, and light, like salt, is pretty amazing, so long as it's illuminating something else. Light by itself can be pointless, even destructive. That's why Jesus says we are to let our light shine before *others*, not ourselves, so that those others may see our good works and give glory --not to us--but to God. Did you catch that? It's subtle, but, oh, it's so very important. We shine as the light of the world not for our own sake, but for the sake of others. We give light so that others may see the way of God. We give light so others may see the way to God. In the end, it isn't really even our light that shine forth after all: it is God's light.

Salt and light are only useful when they enhance something else. We, as followers of Jesus, fulfill our roles as disciples when we flavor the earth, when we illuminate the world with our actions and words; which ultimately point to Christ. As long as we see the life of faith as little more than a promise of reward, a future rest for a chosen few, we lose our flavor and our light is hidden under a basket.

The seriousness with which Jesus commands us to be salt and light can be heard in the final four verses of our text today. Here Jesus says, “*Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. 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.*

With these words, Jesus corrects any misunderstanding about how his followers are to understand the law and the prophets. He has not come to do away with them; rather, he has come to fulfill them. Not only is the call to discipleship one that commands a salty light, it is also one that commands obedience to the fulfillment of the law and the teachings of the prophets. I don't think Jesus was an early champion of inerrancy with his words here. I believe Jesus is saying with these words is that he has come to fulfill the whole of the law and the prophets, to fill them with meaning and not allow them to simply be bullet points by which we judge the actions of other's; after all, that was what the scribes and Pharisees did.

With these words about salt, light, and the fulfillment of the law and prophets, Jesus is setting before us, his followers, some very deep truths about what it means to be his disciples. When we feel that grace is just a ticket on the bus out of Hell, when we feel that our religion is just one of the defining characteristics of all of who we are, when we convince ourselves that our faith is really about how much better we can be than someone else by following more rules or abstaining from more vices. When we begin to coast and live our spiritual life on autopilot, then we begin to lose our flavor. We begin to hide our light under the basket.

Let us not fall into the trap of the scribes and Pharisees. Their righteousness was measured on the tally board of rules followed and rules broken. Let us not fool ourselves into believing that the call to follow Jesus is an easy, free ride into an eternity of comfort in plush mansions on gold-paved streets.

You are called to be salt; and you are called to be the light of the world. There is a song, Go Light Your World and it talks about how each of us have a candle in our soul. Some of us allow it to burn brightly, while others hide it away. The Holy Spirit enters into your life and lights that candle; and if you allow Him, he will dwell within you. He will walk with you daily, he will talk to you and give you direction.

The Holy Spirit wants to be a permanent resident of your life and your soul. He calls you to take your light into the darkness of this world. Seek out the hopeless, seek out the helpless, seek out the lonely, seek out the confused, seek out the tired and the weary. Be a light to them, show them the path that leads to Jesus, show them the promise of life we have with him. Be Salt to them, help them to savor this life that we have been given and taste the victory of Jesus Christ.

We are the salt of the earth; we are the light of the world. May we flavor the earth with the truth of the One who has fulfilled the law of God. May we light the way of the One of whom the prophets could only dream. May we commit to being salt and light, so that our righteousness may exceed the righteousness of those who keep tabs. May we commit ourselves to the One who calls us to the joyous responsibility of sharing the love of God with others as salt and light.