**February 12, 2023 Matthew 5:13-20**

***Salt and 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. Salt is something that is so ***common***.
   1. Salt makes everything ***taste*** better.
   2. Salt is also a ***preservative***.
   3. Salt also has ***medicinal*** qualities.
   4. Jesus calls us to be the ***salt*** of the earth.
2. Jesus tells us that we are to be a ***light*** into the world.
   1. Light exposes the ***truth***, the true nature of things.
   2. Light also ***reveals***.
   3. The light of Christ exposes our need for ***salvation***.
3. Jesus calls us to point to the ultimate source of ***light***, Him
   1. Salt and Light are the language of God; the language of ***hope*** and ***love***.
   2. We are called to be salt and light and to speak the language of God as we live our ***faith***.
   3. We are called to live in a way that those who do not know ***God***, but know us; will come to know ***God*** because they know us.
4. Live according to God’s ***instructions***.
   1. Reflect God’s ***desires*** and ***commands*** to all of the world.
   2. Make this world a ***better*** place.
5. If following Jesus was a crime; would there be enough ***evidence*** to convict you of following Jesus?
   1. Are you being ***salt***?
   2. Are you being ***light***?

**Script:**

As I sit for breakfast many weekend mornings, I sit at the table and look out the windows to the weather outside. Some days it's cloudy and maybe even raining or snowing. But my favorites are the days when the sun is shining brightly against a cloudless sky, and the sun's rays are warm against my face. As I eat my eggs I am able to immediately sense if they are made the way I like them. After almost 29 years of marriage, Jan has the art of making my eggs down to a science. No matter if she makes the eggs or I do, I can taste right away if there is something missing, especially when I forget to sprinkle a little salt on them. They just aren’t as good without the salt.

We all have different things we prefer when it comes to our food and the weather. But I doubt there is anybody who prefers a cloudy day, or a bland diet. Without the sun shining on our face, we find ourselves feeling gloomy or dismayed. And that bland diet I mentioned earlier, I would venture to guess that there are few people who prefer it over a meal that is seasoned perfectly; and one of those seasonings is salt.

I read a story about a father who was trying to teach his child what a Christian should be. He talked about being the salt of the earth and the light of the world and a few other teachings. When the lesson was over, the father realized he had his work cut out for himself because the little child asked, “Daddy, have I ever met one of these Christians?” Salt and light are important parts of our lives, and Jesus even mentions them in scripture. In a very simple way, like that little boy, Jesus challenges us with two very vivid images of what it means to be a Christian, using Salt and Light as his objects. Turn with me in your bibles to Matthew 5:13-20 and stand as we share in the reading of our sermon passage for today.

Jesus speaks, “*(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*”

So let's look at salt first. Salt is something that is so common that is easily overlooked, unless of course you notice it missing in your favorite food or are forced to follow a bland salt-free or low sodium diet. I like it on everything from my eggs to popcorn, on my steak, pork, and chicken. Without salt most of the joy of eating is lost. Salt makes everything taste better. I would venture to say it is one of the most crucial of all seasonings used to enhance the flavor of food.

But salt is also a preservative. Before the invention of refrigeration or canning, most meats were preserved in one of two ways; it was either dried and smoked, or it was packed in salt and cured. Packed in salt, meat would last for years, so salt was seen as a preservative.

Salt also has medicinal qualities. Before modern medicine salt was used as an antiseptic. If you got it in an open wound it would burn like the dickens. Salt is oftentimes poured into an open wound to clean it of any impurities. Sometimes a concoction of salt and vinegar was used for the same purpose, to clean and purify the wound so it would heal quicker.

Jesus calls us to be the salt of the earth. In other words, we are called to be a seasoning that enhances the flavor of life through the living out of our faith. In other words, the way we live should make things better. We are also called to be a preservative; helping to preserve the standard established in scripture of morality and behavior. We are also called to be curative. With our lord’s message of hope and forgiveness, we can be used to bring healing to the hurts and relief to the struggles of this world. Many of us will respond with, “we know this pastor.”

But there is one other aspect I would like you to consider. In calling us to be the salt of the earth; we are called to season the world with the flavor of grace. We are called to help preserve the world from decay. We are called to bring healing, and we are called to make people thirsty for the living water himself, Jesus.

Jesus also tells us that we are to be a light into the world. Many of us do not know what absolute darkness really is. In our electrified world we are never truly without some sort of manmade light. And when we are there are still many other natural forms of light that seem to seep through. We have street lights and pole lights. There are porch lights and decorative lights around the house. We even have night lights and the lights on the face of our electronic devices to negate complete darkness. Ever since the dawn of time we have been pushing back at a world of complete darkness. But it was Thomas Edison who really moved us forward with his electric light.

But why do we push back? Because light exposes the truth, light exposes the true nature of things. Have you ever walked into an old house or barn and thought this is quaint. But the next day when the sun is at its full brightness you are able to notice every crack and crevice; you can see the cracked paint and the worn carpet; as well as the dust on everything. The light exposes all of it. But, light also reveals. If you are in a room at night when the electricity goes off, when you are plunged into the darkness everything on the floor becomes a hazard. From children’s toys to the furniture legs. Anything that you could walk into becomes a hazard. Any light in those instances is helpful in guiding your path, even the flashes of lightning help you to see a possible path to travel and what dangers lie before you. It is the same in your spiritual life, the light of Christ exposes our need for salvation; it reveals where the dangers lie ahead and reveals the safety, direction, and new life that can be found.

Have you ever seen Steven Spielberg’s movie Schindler’s List? As I watched this movie, I remember the sadness I felt for those in the Polish Ghetto. I was appalled at the ruthless ways in which these people were treated; But I felt hope for many who were spared. To many Oskar Schindler was a profiteering capitalist who was padding his pockets at the misfortune of others. But as time went on the movie we see Schindler transforming into an unlikely light in the darkness of the Nazi War Machine. With his assistant, Izak Stern, he bluffs and bribes his way through Nazi hierarchy to save as many Jewish people as possible. To do this he has Stern type up a list of Jewish names whom Schindler claims are indispensable, because they were essential for his war factory to operate. At first the factory makes simple items like mess kits. But then they are transferred to another factory where they would build shells for large guns. In the end, Schindler’s instructions were that he did not want any of the shells to function properly. Stern is suspicious at first, but eventually he sees Schindler’s ideas, and he sees Schindler himself as a benefactor to the Jewish people.

At one point in the film, Stern comes to Schindler and says: “This list is life.” Throughout the movie we see Schindler fighting to retain his employees, and on one occasion, barely saves a shipment of women who had been left off at a death camp by mistake. The stark black and white photography of the film shows the contrast between the darkness of the Nazis and the light that Schindler has chosen to follow and has become for the people on “the list.” Jesus calls us and challenges us to be the same kind of light in the world today. He calls us not only to be light but to point to the ultimate source of light, Him.

I read a story this week about a mother mouse who decided teach her children about the world. She gathers them and instructs them to follow her and pay attention. They walked down the hall and turned to the right; continued down another hall and took another right; where they suddenly found themselves in front of the sleeping family cat. The frightened mother signaled to the children to be very quiet and they proceeded with their walk when the cat opened his eyes. The cat raised his paw in preparation to hit the mother cat. The little mice were petrified, as was their mother. As the cat's paw began to drop the mother mouse turned and looked directly in the cat's eyes and began to loudly bark like a dog. In fear the cat turned and ran from the room. The mother mouse, relieved that the threat was over, turned to her children, wiped her brow, shook a little and said, “Children, I hope you learned a valuable lesson. Sometimes it’s good to know a second language!”

It is the same for us, It is good to know a second language, and I am not talking about French or Spanish; Salt and Light are the language of God; the language of hope and love. When this language is translated into action it becomes the most beautiful language ever spoken. We are called to be salt and light and to speak the language of God as we live our faith. We are called to live God’s word. As we live this life, we are called to live in a way that those who do not know God, but do know you; will come to know God because they do know you.

SO as we live according to God’s instructions we will be called upon to walk differently than others. Because we walk in the light of God, we will reflect his desires and commands to all of the world. our actions will be seen and noted by all who are looking and paying attention. Our behavior is salt to this life. As we live according to God’s will we freely disperse the seasoning to make this world a better place. We will season it, we will preserve the life that Jesus taught us to live; we will add flavor to something many do not know exists and healing to what many may feel is dying.

I heard a saying this week that I stated several years ago. It said, “If following Jesus was a crime; would there be enough evidence to convict you of following Jesus?” So you be the judge; if you claim to be a follower of Jesus Christ, what evidence is there that you are His follower, and would it be enough to convict you in court. Are you being salt? Are you bringing a flavor to the world around you? Are you being a seasoning, are you bringing preservation, are you bringing healing? Are you being light? Are you revealing the truth of Jesus to all you encounter? Are they seeing the error in their ways; are they seeking a way to be in the light?

Today we are going to share in a ritual known to all Christians as the Lord’s Supper. Some refer to it as the eucharist, others as communion, and we know it as the ritual where we commemorate the last supper that Jesus shared with his disciples before his crucifixion. As we prepare to share in this meal we must realize that this meal is only for those who know Jesus as Lord and Savior. For those who have repented of their sin and strive to walk a blameless life. So before we begin this is an opportunity to confirm your faith and walk with Christ.