

## 2-2-20 SERMON CCI Matthew 5: 13-17 *Pass the Salt and Leave the Light On*

In the modern day and age we live in, people are very conscious about taking care of our health and the environment. We know the importance of cutting down on fats and salt in our diet, and we understand that our efforts to recycle and use clean sources of energy do our part against climate change. So Jesus' words in this morning's text fly in the face of our modern understandings. They are not very heart-friendly (You are the salt of the earth- as though he didn't know that salt raises our blood pressure); nor are they eco-friendly (Let your light so shine –didn't our dad teach us to turn off the lights when we leave a room?) Jesus might have used different examples if He were speaking today, but His words still have an important message about who we are as Christ-followers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Jesus used two simple metaphors that everyone listening would understand to describe who we are as followers of Christ. Let's start with salt. "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men." Jesus did not say, "You need to be salt" He said ***we are salt***. We are all salt that God wants to use in this world.

These words are famous even today. If someone is genuine, honest, and useful, we say he or she is a "salt of the earth" kind of person. If you think about it, salt is an amazing mineral. It enhances the flavor of our foods, acts as a preservative, melts the ice on frozen steps and roads, and helps our muscles move, and more. Salt is necessary for life. In Jesus' day, it was so valuable that it was sometimes used as money. The word "salary" comes from the Latin word, *salarium* which literally means "salt-money." And our expression, "That man isn't worth his salt," recognizes the high value of salt.

Salt had two primary uses in Jesus' day. First, salt was a seasoning. Even today, almost everything we cook has salt in it- even desserts. I don't know about you, but I like salt on my food; salt brings out the flavors. But more important, salt was a preservative. Salt slows down food spoiling. Meat left to itself will spoil. Cure the meat with salt and it will last a long time. Whichever meaning Jesus had in mind, salt was essential to life; it had a purpose. So when he talked about losing our saltiness, he was talking about losing our purpose as his followers in the world. As "salt of the earth," we have responsibility. Be salty.

Jesus' second metaphor for who we are is light. "You are the light of the world." Light was an important metaphor for God's people in the Old Testament.

Advent isn't so far away that we don't remember hearing Isaiah 9: 2 "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light," speaking of the One to come who we now know is Jesus. In Isaiah 42:6 the Lord also called his people "to be a light for the Gentiles." Jesus said we are God's light in the world.

Jesus gave two examples of what it means to be the light of the world.

1) We're to be like a city on a hill that cannot be hidden. Whether we like it or not, our lives are on display for others to see. Followers of Jesus are to be conspicuous in the same way that a hilltop city is conspicuous. When we are light, people notice that we are different, we will see the world differently than most people, we find different things important. And like a city on a hill all lighted up to point the way home, the way we live is meant to point the way to God. Our faith in Christ is meant to be conspicuous. Faith is not meant to be a private matter we don't talk about. That's more like Robin Hood's city hidden in the forest to keep them safe.

2) The second light illustration is of the simple clay oil lamps people placed on a lampstand to light their homes after the sun went down. Without electricity, these small lamps were the only light they had. No one would ever consider placing their oil lamp under a bushel basket- its purpose was to provide light, so why would anyone do that? Like salt, lamp oil was too precious to waste like that. Jesus' says his followers are to let their lights shine as conspicuously as a lamp lights a home. We're not just the light inside here; we are the light the world needs to see.

How do we let our lights shine? Jesus said to let our lights shine so people may see our good works and praise God because of them. So letting our lights shine has to do with good deeds, but not in the way our world defines it – good deeds like Boy scouts helping little old ladies cross the street. Jesus said that being light is who we are, so letting our light shine is about our whole way of being, our attitudes, our ways of seeing the world around us, our conduct and words all the time. Anyone can do a good deed and then say, "Whew. Now I can get back to being normal." But when we are following Jesus, really following, not just believing about him to get us into heaven, Jesus' ways of thinking and seeing become our ways of thinking and seeing and our lives change to become more like his. We follow in his footsteps. The things we care about and speak about will be the things Jesus cares about and speaks about. We learn to love people like Jesus does. And we hate the things Jesus hates. We look at what is happening in the world through different eyes. Not like Republicans or Democrats, or Independents.

Not even like Americans, we look through Christian eyes. And we begin to bring light around us with a wisdom that is not our own. In fact, there will be times that we'll be surprised at the wise words that come out of our mouths, because we'll know they weren't ours, but came from God himself.

Salt and light are both useful because they enhance something else. They don't call attention to themselves; they call attention to something else. In fact, by themselves salt and light can be harmful. Salt makes food preserves food and makes food taste better, and boy can you tell when the salt has been left out. I thought about baking a pan of shortbread without the salt and giving you a piece as you came in this morning. You may not have known what was missing but you would have known something was missing. That's what we're like as followers when we don't live our purpose to be salt. We might as well be thrown out like a pan of saltless shortbread. Jesus said **we are** the salt of the earth; it's our purpose. Be salty.

It's pretty obvious when the light has been left out too because the room or situation remains dark. People trip over the furniture and one another, things and people get broken in the dark. It's so easy to just complain about the darkness of the world, rather than letting Christ's light within us shed real light on an issue. How many of us keep the light Jesus has brought into our lives to ourselves rather than sharing it with others? Oh, people know we're religious and maybe even Christian because they know we go to church, but they have no idea what Jesus means to us because we're hiding it. All they see is us. Jesus says we are the light he's left in the world. And when we let His light shine deep within us, it'll shine to the outside and reflect God's goodness. Not because we are such great Christians, but because we serve such a great God. When we speak out, people won't always praise God. But when people oppose us instead, Jesus says just keep shining, love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. There is no wiggle room. We are the light the world needs to see.

Being salt and light is a big assignment. We were not saved by grace to have a ticket to heaven someday; we were saved to serve our calling in the world. Tom Johns said, "You may be the only Bible some people ever read." If people were to watch our lives day after day, listen to how we talk, what we care about, see how we spend our time, how we treat others, what would they learn about God? Do they see evidence of God's love in us? Do they see grace during failure? Do they see justice and truth?

Several of us were able to be at Roma Bowen's memorial service yesterday. The stories people shared about her didn't use the words salt or light but they were still about ways Roma was salt and light in this world, living out the ways of Christ, bringing godly wisdom that brought light. You weren't around Roma very long before you noticed that her life had a salty light that blessed people, and gave glory to God. People reading her life were pointed to God.

Friends, Jesus said we are the salt of the earth and we are the light of the world; it's our purpose as followers of Christ. So let's pass the salt and leave our lights on, may people see God's difference in us, and may God receive the glory.