

Matthew 5:13-20

5:13 "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.

5:14 "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid.

5:15 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.

5:16 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.

5:17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.

5:18 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.

5:19 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.

5:20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

Communion Meditation

Jesus gives us a Job Description: You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Or as Eugene Peterson puts it, Jesus says, "Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be salt seasoning to bring out God-flavors of this earth" and then, "You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill." (*The Message*, Matthew 5)

Did you know that is why you are here on this earth? Life mystery solved. Many voices have other ideas about why we are here also. Advertising tells us we are here to buy great stuff and products that will make us feel skinny, successful, and sexy, the big three Ss in ads. Just watch the SuperBowl commercials tonight and wonder, "What are they selling us?" That voice is telling us you are a consumer.

Other voices tell us why we are here. Chuck worked in Corporate America for a number of years before returning to school to get a teaching degree. Ultimately, he realized that the point of his work was to make money for the company. That was why he was there. And he wasn't motivated by that purpose and felt called to serve in a different way.

Lots of voices tell us why we are here, but Jesus tells us why we are really here- to make a difference in the world and to the whole human race. Salt of the earth. The word used for Earth is really "people." We are salt for the people of the earth. You are light for the world to bring out the God colors. More specifically Jesus says you are to draw people to praise God with your good works. We're going public- as public as city on a hill to be seen.

Speaking of going public. Church folks will ask me sometimes why the church speaks up and advocates for issues (issues that they deem to be political). Usually they are not issues, but things that effect people who are also created by God. Healthcare is a faith issue because Jesus healed people. Housing is a faith issue because God said bring the homeless poor into your homes according to Isaiah 58. Most of us do not do that, but we can work for affordable housing in our community or serve and support Our Daily Rest shelter in Seneca. This is part of what we are called to do. It is why we exist as a church- to be salt and light, to practice godliness and neighborliness. To praise God with our lives not just our voices in worship. Moreover, Jesus does not say, "You are salt and light of the church!" He says you are salt of the human race. You are the light of the world. We are going public.

In the second section of the passage, Jesus speaks of fulfilling the law and prophets. Jesus calls us to live faithfully with reverence for God and respect for your neighbor. When he says he has come to fulfill the law and the prophets he is speaking of the call to live in reverence for God and respect for neighbors. That is what 10 Commandments are. To summarize:

Reverence for God and the name of God. No idols or placing trust in false gods. Reverence for the Lord's day, Sabbath- one in seven days for worship and rest.

Respect for parents, for life, for property, for marriage vows, for the truth and another's good name. Respect for oneself that wrong desires might not overpower us.

The Law is about reverence for God and respect for your neighbor. But Jesus takes it further. He talks about LOVE. Jesus says, Love God and love your neighbor as yourself. His law is Love. Jesus says, he came not to repeal and replace the Law and the prophets, but to fulfill it. This belief is foundational to who are as a church, but also foundational to how we live in the world among people, out in public. We are to be instruments of God's love- this is living out God's commands. And this is knit into our public identity, our national identity.

You may remember John Winthrop from your U.S. History class. He was governor of Massachusetts colony. When he and his shipmates approached the shores of America in the ship Arabella in 1630, he had some famous words for his crew. These words have been repeated by Presidents including John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan as they have famously called our nation a city on a hill. They are biblical words as people of faith, pilgrims and Puritans, landed here seeking welfare and freedom of religion.

Winthrop and his people knew that Roanoke colony had disappeared and the Jamestown colony had challenges. He calls these failures "shipwrecks" and hopes they will have more success. He appeals to them for a better way- a way that was both godly and neighborly as they enter this new world, like Israel into a new promised land. (Now we can discuss some of the downsides of the Puritans in our history later- like burning people at the stake or treatment of the native Americans, for instance.) Listen to what Winthrop said to the people:

Now the only way to avoid this shipwreck and to provide for our posterity is to follow the Counsel of Micah, to do Justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God...(Micah 6:8)

...We shall be a city on a hill, for all eyes to see...(referring to these words of Jesus in Matthew 5:14 and then he continues to describe a vision of public life together)

...for this end, we must be knit together in this work as one man(kind), we must entertain each other in brotherly Affection, we must be willing to abridge our selves of our superfluities, for the supply of others necessities, we must uphold a familiar Commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience and liberality, we must delight in each other, make others Conditions our own, rejoice together, mourn together, labour, and suffer together, always having before our eyes our Commission and Community in the work, our Community as members of the same body, so shall we keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, the Lord will be our God and delight to dwell among us, as his own people and will command a blessing upon us in all our ways...

And then a warning to them to beware of idolatry. Think of the 2nd Commandment.

... But if our hearts shall turn away so that we will not obey, but shall be seduced and worship other Gods, our pleasures, and profits, and serve them, it is propounded unto us this day, we shall surely perish out of the good Land...Therefore let us choose life, that we, and our Seed, may live; by obeying his voice, and cleaving to him, for he is our life, and our prosperity.

Wow. What a vision of our nation as a great city on the hill to shine light on all. A vision based in our faith that seeks the welfare of all people. Now we do not have a theocracy, but a democracy. We have separation of Church and State for some very good reasons.

I have noticed that many of us do not want to deal with public life right now. We are weary of it. I am. I have noticed with the conflicted nature of our world, I want to watch more Netflix, escape reality. I have friends who have left Facebook because engaging with others digitally has been detrimental and toxic to their relationships. They have disengaged. I know some who do not want to be involved personally the church because they disagree with others- not on faith matters, but on public issues. There is dis-ease among us. Many of us would rather withdraw and retreat.

Division is one way that evil works to undermine the cause of Christ. And today Jesus calls us to this table today to mend such brokenness and sin. Jesus comes reminding us of the hope that we share and the common calling to serve God's mission at this table. There is one cup and one loaf and one

Lord at this table. Jesus is calling us, Christians, whose citizenship is first of the Kingdom of God, whose first allegiance is to Jesus Christ as Lord, to be salt to people and light to the world, to bring out the God-likeness in our world. We cannot do so when we are divided and demoralized.

We are God's church and we are here for a purpose to bring out what is best for our communities, towns, nation, world - for all God's people. Jesus says that obeying him is to be great. Want to be great? Make a difference in the world serving Christ and others. In closing, I share a story about engaging with one another rather than withdrawing and dividing.

Night has Ended

Late one evening Rabbi talking with his students watching the stars appear in the heavens one by one. Tell me this says the teacher, "When will we know that the night has ended and the day has begun?" One eager young man jumps in immediately, "You know that the night has ended and the day has begun when you can look off across the pasture and see an animal and know which one is the dog and which is the sheep."

Teacher says nothing gazing off to the distance

"Is this the right answer?" the young man asked after a time.

"It is a good answer, but not the one I am thinking of." replies the teacher.

A second student replies, "You know the night is over and the day has begun when the light falls on the leaves and you can tell if it is a palm tree or a fig tree you are looking at."

"That too is a good answer, but not the one I am looking for," said the teacher.

"Then what is the right answer?" demanded the students. "You answer your own question."

The Rabbi looked out at his disciples and replied, "When you look in the eyes of another human being and see a brother or a sister, you know it is morning. If you cannot see a brother or a sister, you know it will always be night.

Invitation

Jesus said they will come from North, South and East and West to sit together in the Kingdom of God.

Jesus invites all who trust in him to be fed and nourished here

in order to go forth strengthened for a life of faithful service

both in our personal lives and our public life together.

Prayer after Communion

Lord, take us in your hands.

Bless us to serve your purposes.

Break us so that we are open to your ways.

Give us to the world as salt and light

so all may know your holy, sacrificial love

shown to us in the power of the cross

and the hope of resurrection. Amen.