

Sermon of Gospel Matthew 5:13-20
Barbara Monahan February 8, 2025
Be salt and light

Who will know how to have a relationship with Jesus if not through us?

Who will know that God's Kingdom is here, right now, ready to be lived out if not by us?

Last week in Matthew's Gospel, we heard about the beatitudes and that they represent the foundation of God's Kingdom.

If you recall, they are nothing like our modern way of life; in fact, they are the complete opposite.

For example;

"Blessed are the poor in spirit," which means having dependence on God and to live with humility

In our modern society, we live with a culture of self-reliance, performance, and a "brand yourself" mentality.

Society prizes confidence, independence, and projecting competence, and often equates vulnerability with weakness.

"Blessed are the meek," which means being gentle, not grasping for power.

In our modern society, we live with assertiveness as a virtue and the pursuit of power/status.

Success is often measured by dominance, visibility, and influence rather than gentleness or restraint.

As Jesus disciples, we are called to function in society as an alternative and challenging community.

It is by our visible goodness that we will bring glory to God, who created us with goodness and provides what we need to be so.

We are to share what we have and what we know because we want to glorify God.

We want others to know and experience God as we do.

Jesus told us that he would come again and that God's kingdom, as described in the beatitudes, would reign.

We are here to prepare ourselves and others for his coming, so that they, too, live the beatitudes.

I am sharing with you now a poem called "*The Unmoored World*," by an anonymous author, that expresses the chaos we are experiencing and the possibilities of God's Kingdom.

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The compass spins without north,
newsfeeds flare like brushfires,
and every voice insists it is the center.
We have perfected the art of shouting
past one another—
crowds moving faster, arriving nowhere.
Old words for truth lie cracked on the pavement,
trampled by urgency, by certainty,
by the glow of screens that never sleep.
The careful are exhausted.
The ruthless are efficient.
Nothing is neutral; even silence votes.
Somewhere, the future is assembling itself
from spare parts—
algorithms, grievance, hunger, prayer.
It does not announce its name.
It learns us quietly,
studies our fractures, our shortcuts,
our willingness to trade wonder for control.
What approaches will not ask permission.
It will feel inevitable,
like weather,
like gravity remembered too late.
And still—beneath the static—
a question beats its wings:
will what is born of this hour
recognize mercy
when it sees it?

When what is being born of this hour comes to fulfillment, the way we live now will no longer be, because we will be living as Jesus taught us, where each part of creation is as it is created to be, there is abundance, no one is hungry, without shelter, or clothing; everyone has all they need, and we treat each other with God's Agape love – a love that is unconditional and ever-flowing.

In Matthew's Gospel lesson today,

Jesus taught us how to be God's Kingdom, through the use of very ordinary yet powerful words, salt and light.

They are easy for us to remember, and we may think of them as guides when living our daily lives.

By asking ourselves, "Am I being salt or light in this moment with this person or people?"

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I learned from my research for this sermon that salt was a highly sought-after commodity in ancient times because it was a sign of prosperity and was used to season and preserve food.

Some workers were paid in salt instead of money, and that is where we get the term "salary," which means "salt money."¹

The folks Jesus taught in ancient times knew very well what he meant when he said that they were salt. It was a compliment and a directive.

They knew that to be salt meant to be wise, and when the saltiness was lost, they became foolish.

Wisdom comes from discerning with the Holy Spirit for guidance before acting.

We may ask, am I being salt; wise, or foolish in this moment?

They also knew that light was the natural testimony of one's godly life.

People could tell by the way they lived their lives with honesty, gentleness, and care for others that they loved God and wanted to glorify God at all times.

Have you ever met someone for the first time and sensed that they were a wise and godly person?

Salt and light will ooze from us when we work to develop them in ourselves.

Jesus teaches us that, to be his disciples, we are to embody God's life-giving presence by savoring what is good and by being the wisdom and compassion our world needs, especially right now as we see so many people being pulled from or losing their lives without cause.

Our love of God and neighbor is how Jesus wants us to live.

He wants God's wisdom and love to ooze out of us so much so that those around us will give pause to choosing to live as society calls us to live.

They will want what we have, our love and faith in God.

And we can give it to them by inviting them to your beloved church and church events.

Right now, we all suffer from a great deal of violence, despair, stealing, cheating, lying, and hidden hatred.

It is the Church's call, our call, to be a visible witness to an alternative way of living by reconciling relationships, feeding the hungry, being honest, and loving everyone as Jesus loves us.

Through our visible witness as salt and light, we will bring healing and communal flourishing.

¹ planning for rights and rituals pages 113 through 114

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Jesus refers to the commandments at the end of Matthew's Gospel because he is pointing us to the way things are right now, "the breaking of the least of these commandments" and he challenges us when he says, "those who break the commandments and teach others to do the same will be called the least in God's Kingdom because they lost their salt and light."

But those who are being salt and light witnesses to God's Kingdom of the Beatitudes, will have open hearts and minds to God's way of living with love, peace, and wisdom.

This is our purpose.

As disciples of Jesus, we are the salt of the earth because we are God's symbol and influence.

We are also the light of the world, for when our light, our love of God, shines, God's presence and salvation are known.

Being salt and light is powerful and can change the world because, as we continue to respond obediently to the word of God, taught and preached by Jesus and energized by the Holy Spirit, our newly transformed heart will direct us from inside ourselves to the outside world.

The indwelling Holy Spirit directs the renewing of our minds, the disciplining of our bodies, and the purifying of our social relations so that we say yes to God with our entire being.

And our yes will affect everyone around us, as they see us continually being transformed into the likeness of Jesus.

I leave you with two concrete pledges for this week to continue our transformation into salt and light:

Expand your relationships by calling, meeting, or writing a letter to someone you miss or who you know is alone, and invite them to church.

Do one act of care by bringing food to a local pantry, signing up for a volunteer shift, or donating clothing to a shelter.

Our choices have spiritual and communal consequences:

When we, as Jesus' disciples, live as salt and light, we preserve what is good,
make life flavorful with God's wisdom,
and through our visible good works,
we draw others toward a relationship with God.

"Go be salt and light for all to see.

Amen

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Source materials:

Matthew 5:13–20 (Scripture)

Jerome Biblical Commentary, pp. 1182–1183 (notes on salt/light)

Planning for Rights and Rituals, pp. 113–114 (background on salt in the ancient world; salt/salary; ministry as bringing Christ’s light)

Connections Commentary, pp. 227–241 (exegesis linking Matthew, Isaiah, Psalm 112, and 1 Cor. 2; practical implications)

1 Corinthians 2:1–16 and related Connections Commentary, pp. 233–237 (Paul on Spirit and wisdom)