

SALT AND LIGHT

The Rev. Geoff Parker to Foreside Community Church - Falmouth, ME

Sunday, February 9, 2020

Scripture: [Matthew 5:13–20](#)

INTRODUCTION TO THE SCRIPTURE

Today, we're continuing through Jesus's sermon on a mountain as we have it in the Gospel of Matthew. This is the longest continuous collection of Jesus's teaching that we have in the Bible. Which feel weird, right? We spend a lot of time working on how to "follow Jesus," but we don't have whole bunches of books that he wrote for us. Instead, we have the stories that people who followed him wrote, and some of the things he said that they were most impressed by. Including this, so you know it had to be really impressive that they remembered and wrote all this down. I don't think you all would be able to remember a whole sermon of mine... it might be a fun game to play to have everyone write down what they heard.

Last week, we heard a section of blessings... and Jesus started showing us that in God's eyes, the ones who receive blessings are those who the world has not blessed so much... people who were hurting, or felt alone, or were sad... he said God was particularly worried about, and with them.

Here, Jesus starts talking to his followers, and I think... asking them to imagine being in the world a new way...

SERMON

So, salt... who likes salty things? I know that there are sweet people. I live with one. But let's face it,

What are your favorite salty things to eat? How about to make?

So, here's a thing about cooking *or* baking that I will tell you...

If your dish tastes like salt? It's not well seasoned.

Salt is this amazing thing in our lives, and it was even more amazing in the time of Jesus. Salt was precious, it was traded on markets, in some places it was used as actual money

But as precious as it is? What it really does for us? ...Is make *other stuff taste good*. If you're tasting salt, and not, steak... or brussels sprouts (don't give me that look!) something has gone wrong.

The same goes for light...

See, I have this flashlight. If I went outside in the dark at night... and I held the flashlight *this way*...

How do you think that would go for me? Would I get very far that way?

How about if I held the flashlight *this way*? See the light shines out, and what it does is the light reflects all sorts of things so that I can *see* it. Much better, huh?

So the challenge is for us: how are we going to be seasoning for the world? Not the taste of the world, the seasoning: the thing that brings out and celebrates and elevates all the other flavors...

The challenge for us: how are we going to be light? Light that shines on others and for others.

You are the salt of the earth.

You are the light the world.

Who's the "you?" You who want to follow Jesus. You who live in the world on all the other days outside of Sunday... In all those days, how are you shining for others, what are you bringing to the kitchen to enhance everybody's meal? Because in that working together, there's something that Jesus is trying to teach us.

This month is Black History Month in this country. It took a long time to arrive: after hundreds of years of slavery, and 61 years of segregation, in 1926 a man named Carter Woodson decided that in the week in which the nation celebrated Abraham Lincoln, we should also lift up the stories and histories of the people who were most affected by his presidency, black people who had been freed, and were now finally free to build a story for themselves, a history even, when so much of that had been taken from them.

Black institutions, and a whole lot of churches, took up the cause. It was a success, and finally morphed into Black History Month at Kent State University in 1970, before Gerald Ford made it official for the country in 1976.

I hear people sometimes debate the wisdom of Black History Month: some would say a month, and a short one at that, is pretty poor space to give to the history of a people. Some challenge the idea of focusing and limiting a study of history

To which, of course, we have to note that for hundreds of years, when people talked about "history", what they meant was the history of people who looked like me, and like a bunch of us.

Carter Woodson knew that when you have no story, it is easy for you to be forgotten, or even erased.

Because the story that we tell about our past shapes our future: we know this as we read the teachings of a Jewish Jesus who was steeped in the story and tradition of his people, from Moses and the Ten Commandments on down, and who preached to them about how the blessed were those who hungered for righteousness... who told them that God was right there with them in their lives. Because, in fact, Jesus was a light all of his own: God's light shining on people who thought that God might have forgotten them, or that Kings and fancy people were somehow better... Jesus shows up to lift up the story of people who were poor, who were hungry, whose voices weren't being heard.

When stories and history, and even life itself has been erased or hidden for other people... Jesus calls us to act to lift them up. Not to take over the dish like way too much salt, and not to shine so that people can only see us. To make others more visible, and more welcome, ... I don't know, more delicious? Maybe the metaphor doesn't work right all the way.

Jesus says he comes to fulfill the law, the story of his people... but here, with salt and light, he's inviting us to see the weight, the power of the law of Moses is in how we are with other people.

Jesus preaches and tells us that the ones the world least expects are actually blessed, like we said last week, *and that if we were to follow him we should enhance life for them and shine on them... and on each other.* Because we all need a little extra flavor from our friends and family and community, and because we all need someone to shine for us... and shine on us some time. To help us be fully ourselves.

So, you, followers of Jesus go out and bring the flavor of God with us, the flavor of the love of God out to the world... go out and shine and shine and shine... not for yourself, but for the wonder and beauty of this world that God has given us. Amen.