

Matthew 5:13-16
Salt and Light
Sunday February 5th, 2017

In one church I served there was a woman who added a lot of spice to the congregation through her hair... Let me explain. Kate I will call her, loved to change the color of her hair: red, pink, blue, green and various streaks and spots. There were even a few “oops, that wasn’t the color I thought it was going to be.”

So it was always interesting to show up to church and see what Kate was wearing. Now what made it even more fascinating was that Kate was a grandma 6 times over. She had more interesting hair than her teenage granddaughters who attended church with her.

Spice, salt, flavor that is what we are supposed to add to the world, for we are the salt of the earth! **“Salt of the earth,”** what does that mean?

First of all it means we bring flavor to the bland tasteless. Indeed we are to be the spice of life. Where and when we can, we are to bring joy, and happiness, and love to a hurting world.

Second, salt in Jesus’ day was very valuable. Roman soldiers would sometimes be paid in salt not silver. That is where the phrase, “worth his salt” comes from. If you do a good job you are worth your pay, your salt. Salt was a means of monetary exchange. It was very valuable in the days before refrigerators for preserving food.

So **third it was a means of preservation or salvation for the food,** as is the gospel message to the world.

So what good news when Jesus said to us, **“You are the salt of the earth.”** He was saying **we are incredibly valuable, we add spice to life** and in fact through the message he has given us, **we offer eternal life to all who hear and respond.**

In fact, raise your hand if you believe that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

Now say “Amen” if he is your Lord. Great! We’ve got the beginning part of Christianity, the getting into heaven part, the being save part down.

Because the Bible says, “If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raise Him from the dead, you shall be saved...” Romans 10:9

Saltiness is essential to salt. Duh. If you have salt it is salty tasting unless it gets contaminated or diluted. That is Jesus warning or “bad news” in these verses. Jesus is saying stay pure and true and useful to the Kingdom or He will pick another. There is nothing so dangerous as to be useless in the New Testament. Jesus is saying be salty. **Let your essential nature as a Christian come out.** Be the spice of life. Offer salvation to the world, live out your incredible worth as a child of God by taking care of the other children of God.

Now light. You are both the salt and the light of the world. Just as saltiness is essential to salt, **illumination is essential to light.** Once something is lit it will be seen. Once you are on fire for Jesus others will gather around you to watch you burn as John Wesley said.

A scholar wrote this, “**The salt and light sayings picture mission as inherent to discipleship, as saltiness is essential to salt and shining is to light.** With these three metaphors of salt, light, and city the Matthean Jesus strikes a death blow to all religion that is purely personal and private.” NIB 182 Gospel of Matthew

Israel originally had the task to carry God’s light to the gentiles. During and before Jesus’ day they were very evangelistic in terms of the Jewish faith, but they got lost in the minutia of the Law. Following the Law and the various interpretations of the Law became more important than bringing anything to the world. Isaiah 42:6 says, “**I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations,..**”

Dr. Barkley puts it this way, “There can be no such thing as secret discipleship, for either the secrecy destroys the discipleship, or the discipleship destroys the secrecy.” Barkley Matthew Vol. 1, p. 142

The call and charge here is to be just like Jesus. Once we have the salvation and eternal life part down, what’s next? Well discipleship is next,... becoming like Jesus,... modeling our lives and actions after Jesus.

And Jesus came too eventually,... when the time was right,... the Kairos moment... be revealed to the world. He came to be a spectacle. He was and is the **Light of the World** and we are called to reflect that light, bring that light into the world.



And we do this better together, than separately. On the altar and screen are a bunch of salt lamps. A salt lamp if you are not familiar is a hunk of salt with lamp or light within it. I think they are rather pretty.

We have two large ones in our home and I named them “Io” and “Europa” after 2 of the moons of Jupiter. Within each lamp on the altar is a tea light. It shines through the salt and the heat and light are supposed to decrease the number of unhealthy positive ions in your home.

But for our purposes the metaphor is that the light of Christ that is within us shines through us **to bring His light to the world**. I told you once of the little girl who asked her mom, “Jesus is in my heart right?” Mom says, “Yes, Jesus is in your heart.” Girl, “And Jesus is the light of the world?” Mom, “Yes, Jesus is the light of the world.” Girl, “Then if Jesus is in my heart and he is the light of the world, shouldn’t he shine through?”

We all should say, “Yes!” It is essential to our discipleship to let the light of Jesus Christ shine through.”

And together we make a city. Most often we speak of the church as the Body of Christ, which we recognize in the sacrament of Holy Communion of which we are partaking of today. But another great metaphor for the church is as a great city. The best example of this is the many Bible references to the city of Jerusalem. The ultimate reference being in the book of Revelation with the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven that is a cube 1500 miles on a side.

When I was in Israel I visited Jesus’ home town of Nazareth. It sat on a great hill. Here’s a modern day picture of Nazareth still on that great hill.



It stood out from the valley below that was all agricultural with hardly any buildings. In fact, that is one thing that struck me about Israel, the cities and towns were very built up, vertically, and outside the cities there were very few houses.



So I can imagine, especially at night how a city on a hill in Jesus day with all the fires and lamps lit would stand out. We when we are practicing discipleship together we stand out in this world.

The type of discipleship that Jesus refers to here is “good works.” Good works that are not hidden. People would only put a lamp under a bowl or bucket when they left their homes to keep the flame lit and the house from being burned down.



It was hard to light fires and wicks on lamps; so once it got burning you let it burn. It was for illumination of the home. So to our lives, when we come on fire with the love of Jesus Christ we are to illuminate others. It is essentially who we are.

Now good works are these and it brings us back to the thought of spice and flavor. 'There are 2 words for "good" in the Greek of the Bible. "Agathos" simply means good in terms of quality.

"Kalos" which is used here not only means good in terms of quality but also a thing is captivating and beautiful and attractive.' Barkley Matthew Vol. 1 p. 144

Our Good Works should not only be of good quality, but they should be "captivating, beautiful and attractive." And we do this better together than separately. We do this better as a city than as a hut. And we do it in the name of Jesus so that people can give thanks and glory to God for what they see.

Our good works make us feel good. They bless others. But their ultimate purpose is to bring recognition and glory to God.

Now one thing I am very happy about is how Vista Church recognizes this and together in our missions to the world tries to live this out. "Mission" is what we do outside the church and "ministry" is what we do for ourselves within the church.

In mission Vista Church brings glory to God in subtle and positive ways. It tries to share the light of Christ and be the City on a Hill. Here's how we do it:

Our 50 foot Cross and Flame is being relit; so that it indeed can be seen again from the highway, because our facilities here are indeed like City on a Hill bringing glory and honor to the salvation that came through Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

The Creative Hands group whenever they make a piece of clothing they put a tag in it showing it came from Vista Church.

Our Snack Pack mission has a tag in every back pack that tells of its origin.

Our Prayer Shawl ministry/mission puts a tag and of course a prayer on all the items they distribute.

And then the church puts on events and creates Spiritual Space to invite people to in order to develop relationships with people to one day invite them into sacred space such as this worship service.

Events like Vista Fine Arts programs, a great one is coming up on February 19th. They are “Vista” programs not just a Fine Arts programs.

Events like our Walk to Bethlehem that is an unabashed presentation of the Good News of the birth of God into our world.

Events like the men’s Rummage Sale and more directly like the Ladies Brunch & Baby Shower for the Family First Pregnancy Care Center & Family Diaper Bank on Saturday February 18th at 10am.

This is a wonderful event to invite anyone you know to who loves life, children and families and wants to make a difference in this world. Jan will tell you more later. All of these events being done in the name of the church; all of these events take many, many people to put on; we become that **city on a hill that can’t be hid.**

The light, the illumination to the Glory of God is always there. It is subtle at times but direct and unashamed!

Together we are a city on a hill. Individually we are lights. Our larger society and even denomination may disappoint you; but here in the local church we can come together in local missions and ministry to our local part of the world.

And still even more personally we are called to be salt and light in the most common human interactions in our daily life. Do you still tip

well even after all the price of food in restaurants has gone up? Do the servers look forward to the Christians, to you after Church?

Do you treat people with deep respect in the way you talk to those you meet, and even the way you drive? Do you help people put their hope and faith in God because of the way they see you living and acting and talking? Do you bring joy and happiness and love into the lives of others so that they can give glory to God?

Be your essential salty, light filled selves! Be Jesus for others. That's who you have been created in Jesus Christ to be.

Picture of Jax

We have a dog named Jax. Jax is essentially a comfort dog. Where anyone of us is in the house there Jax is. His essential nature is to curl up with you wherever you are. He was glued to me while I outlined this sermon and near me for most of the time I typed this sermon. It is his essential nature.

God has made you salty and spicy in Jesus. Let yourself be that.

God has put his light in you... let it shine.

In Jesus' name amen.