

“Live as Salt and Light”

Matthew 5:13-16

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Today is World Communion Sunday. No matter what kind of Jesus’ teachings you follow or no matter what type of churches you may belong to either Catholic or Protestant faith community, all Christian churches over the world celebrate *this* day as a reminder of Christian unity. This is significantly theological. Indeed, we Christians are called for a common purpose, mission and discipleship beyond our theological and doctrinal differences. This morning, I hope that we will be reminded of our Christian calling and to rediscover our spiritual identity as Jesus’ followers.

What did Jesus tell his followers about Christian identity? Jesus was very clear and straightforward in his teaching. He explained our identity using two images, *salt and light*. He says, “*You are the salt of the earth*” and “*you are the light of the world.*” What does *this* really mean to us? How can we be the salt and light? Certainly we can’t be transformed into these materials. We need to understand Jesus’ spiritual point from its function and purpose. Jesus commands us to realize that *we* are really the salt and light which means each of us are created and made by God with special gifts and purpose. We really matter to God! *What is the intrinsic meaning to follow Christ Jesus?* It may sound too theological, but this question is closely related to the purpose of the Church.

Let us go deeper in today’s Scripture reading. Our reading is a part of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Jesus has just returned from his temptation in the wilderness and just gathered his first disciples and a crowd. He began his ministry and proclaimed the Kingdom of God at the top of a mountain. Again, Jesus’ main concern and ultimate goal is the expansion of the Kingdom of God. I have preached a couple of Sundays in a row about the concept of the Kingdom of God. It is not a territorial nor geographical understanding, but it is the reign of God’s influences, goodness and accomplishment. It is the perfect shalom, justice and the state of ‘spiritual happiness’ theologically speaking. Now Jesus, our spiritual master challenges his disciples, followers and us to be salt and light to participate in the mission for God’s kingdom. What can we do for God’s kingdom as salt? I found a couple of spiritual insights in these Jesus’ teachings.

First, Jesus didn’t ask us to become salt, but remind us that we are already the salt of the earth. None of us are not useless no matter whether you are young or old. Salt never changes regardless of time or situations. Jesus reminded his

disciples and followers that they were not meaningless or powerless people in the world, but wanted to let people know that God already gave them ability, capacity and important talents and gift to transform the world. In order to execute this mission, we simply should know that we already have God's power to accomplish this mission. Sometimes, we forget how important we are in God's eyes because each of us is God's special creation. Peta Crane in her devotional essay writes:

You are special. You are the only one in all creation who has your set of abilities. Oh, there will always be somebody who is better at one of the things you are good at, but no one in the universe can reach the quality of your combination of talents, ideas, abilities and feelings. You are special. You are rare. And, in rarity, there is great value to us here on earth. Because of your great rare value, you need not attempt to imitate others. You will accept - yes celebrate - your differences. You are beginning to see that God made you special for a very important purpose. He must have a job for you that no one else can do as well as you. Out of all the billions of applicants, only one is qualified, only one has the right combination of what it takes. **That one is you.**"

When Jesus preached his lesson on the mount, he gave blessings to those who mourn, hunger, are merciful, and are peacemakers who endured persecution and hardships under Israel's religious authorities. The provocative point is that Jesus called his disciples and a crowd to be the salt of the earth. Salt is so basic and essential to our human life that Jesus felt no need to explain what it meant. But this expression would provoke the religious authorities and political power groups if they could have been there among Jesus' followers. In the time of Jesus, and before, to the Israelites, "the religious authorities" were regarded as "salt" for Israel. But now Jesus tells us that **EVERYONE** is the "salt of the earth". Please be aware that Jesus never talked about being the "money", "success" and "power" of the earth which were a more desperate and urgent need for the people, but instead emphasized "salt." Jesus claims our proud self-identity as precious and special to God and reminds us how important we are and what great mission we are called to do. Our Christian calling to re-claim our precious and special identity and willingly to participate in the holy mission of building God's community.

Second, Not only did Jesus tell his followers to be important as God's children, but reminded us that God also made us "light bearers" bringing out the "God-colors" in the world. Rabbis and religious authorities believed that they were holy, chosen to be the "lights" of Israel. Christians, the marginal, economically poor group, women and other gentiles were treated as a part of

darkness in Jesus' time. But Jesus encouraged his followers to keep their faith, keep their light shining into the darkness. Jesus assured them that in any life circumstance, God has given us light. A couple of years ago, I shared my pastoral letter with a title, "God's lighthouse" in the Acorn. Here is a part of my spiritual reflection.

My baby Jacob is a 2 year-old boy. He loves two things: The first is he loves to shine a flashlight in the darkness and the other is he loves to wear a superhero cape. Last night, our family went to the church for a walk and we enjoyed the night breeze. Jacob was excited to go out and play with a flashlight. He was also wearing a superhero cape. As parents, it is fun and joy to see our little one's running and jumping around the church campus. When he saw our brand new church sign, he ran over there and climbed up the sign. I appreciated a bright church sign in the night. At night time, I saw there were still many cars passing by our church. I am sure that the drivers on Fair Oaks Blvd couldn't miss us even at night. While I was watching the cars seeing the bright new sign, it reminded me of a 'lighthouse'. Lighthouses guide ships to find the right direction for their safe journey. Jacob loves to shine a flashlight in the darkness, because he can see what is ahead of him if he holds a flashlight in his hand. I desire that our church community can be 'God's lighthouse' for the souls.

Jesus encourages us to be the light of the world. WE are created to shine our light before others. Our Fair Oaks Church is here on a hilltop for *that* purpose! God is not a secret to be kept. Our Christianity is to be visible, to be seen, to be noticed! Church has never been a self-interest community, but always been a mission- oriented and others- centered community. Stanley Hauerwas, theologian and ethicist spiritually challenges us, "Church doesn't need a social ethic. Church itself is a social ethic." I pray that our church will continue to be the salt and light for the people and the community. Let us continue to keep our lights shining brightly and be the salt of the earth. Amen.