

“Salt And Light”

Matthew 5:13-16

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Christianity differentiates from Judaism. Even though Judaism and Christianity talk about the one same God, each found different images of God. For example, Jesus introduces us to different images of God like graciousness, compassion, and caring. God is love. If you look carefully at Jesus’ ministry, he always focused on the disciples and the crowd rather than law. Jesus mentioned that he didn’t come to destroy Moses’ law, but to fulfill it through people around him. Jesus meant *you and me* here this morning! But, Judaism has “Torah-oriented” faith and they still await their own Messiah. In order to learn the essence of Christianity, we should read Jesus’ original teachings in the Gospels. For the next six weeks, I am going to explore Jesus’ parables for our spiritual growth with hope to deepen our faith together.

Our Scripture reading is very simple and easy. 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. Jesus gave blessings to those who mourn, hunger, who are merciful, and peacemakers enduring persecution and hardships under Israel’s religious authorities and Roman Empire. And he talked about today’s message as a part of his sermon that morning. Jesus told his disciples and a crowd to be the salt and light of the world. While I was working on my message, I seriously wondered why Jesus didn’t talk about “money”, “success” and “power” which were a more desperate and urgent need for the people, but instead emphasized “salt” and “light”? First, let me talk about “Salt.”

Salt is so basic and essential to our human life that Jesus felt no need to explain what it meant. Imagine any soup or steak without salt, you wouldn’t have a good appetite to eat that food. When I learned English for the first time, one of the expressions I heard was, “Can you pass me the salt?” Probably, there are no restaurants without salt. The word, "salary" is derived from "salt". Salt has been used at least since 6000 BC. In ancient times, salt was important and valuable. The provocative point is that Jesus called his disciples and a crowd to be the salt of the earth. It would provoke the religious authorities and political power group if they could have been there among Jesus’ followers. In the time of Jesus, and before, to the Israelites, “Torah-Moses’ law” or “the religious

authorities” were regarded as “salt” for Israel. Now Jesus tells us that *His* disciples and a crowd are the “salt of the earth”. Jesus also proclaims each of us to be the salt as well. What does it mean that “**YOU** are salt”? The purpose of Jesus’ ministry, life, suffering death and resurrection as the Son of God was to expand God’s love to everyone regardless of their status. For those who mourn, hunger, are persecuted and are blessed, theirs is the kingdom of God. Jesus dared to die proclaiming this good news and celebrate with everyone around him. Jesus wanted to remind all of us that **YOU are important to God!** You are special to God’s eyes. This is it!

In Jesus’ time and after, his disciples were undergoing persecution, and hardships under Roman Empire’s occupation and oppression. Their faith was challenged and they were discouraged to continue keeping the faith. Persecution, life challenges, discrimination and hardships were not only things in the time of Jesus, but today we all are also going through our own burdens, sufferings and hardships. I imagine if I were among a crowd and other disciples, what else did Jesus share to encourage his people? Sometimes we are so fearful and afraid to go through and to overcome these difficult times. I shared this before, but I want to introduce again, this poem that Jesus might have shared to encourage his followers on the Mount.

“You are special, in all the world there is nobody like you. No one sees things just as you do. In all of time there has been no one who laughs like you, no one who cries like you. And what makes you laugh and cry will never provoke identical laughter and tears from anybody else, ever.....

“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.**” (by Peta Crane)

Not only did Jesus tell his followers to be important as God’s children, he reminded us that God also made us “light bearers” bringing out the “God-colors” in the world. Fred B Craddock reminds us, saying that “the way of

Christ is mission: witnessing and benevolent intrusion into the life of the world. There is no way that Christ's cause can be converted into an individual or community lifestyle of self-interest, self-protection and defense against vulnerability. To do so is not to interpret Christ differently, but to abandon him." Rabbis and religious authorities believed that they were holy, chosen to be the "lights" of Israel. Christians, the margin, economically poor group, women and other gentiles were treated as a part of darkness in Jesus' time. 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 light in our darkness. In the same way, we are overwhelmed by the power of darkness and challenges in our daily lives, but God has given us courage and boldness to work in hope when we are in despair.

Building a city on a hill can be a safe place for self-defense, but the increased visibility also attracts even more hostility. Putting a lamp under a bushel certainly reduces the chance of having it blown out, but the price for such protection is darkness. Jesus encouraged that YOU are the light of the world and as Christians are called to shine your light before others. Our Fair Oaks Church is here on a hilltop to shine, too! God is not a secret to be kept. Our Christianity is to be visible, to be seen, to be noticed and is not to be hid. In our times, there are still many of our neighbors and friends who have lost their way and those who are wondering which way to go. As I wrote in the August Acorn, I wish and pray that our church can be 'God's lighthouse' for the souls so that they find us and join us discovering a new direction for their lives. Let us continue to keep our lights shining bright. Amen.