

**“You Are”**

## COMMUNION

February 5, 2023

**Matthew 5:13-20**

<sup>13</sup>“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled underfoot.

<sup>14</sup>“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. <sup>15</sup>No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup>In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

<sup>17</sup>“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. <sup>18</sup>For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

<sup>19</sup>Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>20</sup>For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

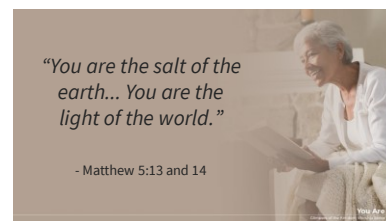


Last week we began our journey through the Sermon on the Mount with the Beatitudes – Jesus’ “blessed are”

statements. As we walked through the Beatitudes, we were

reminded that although we like to turn them into imperatives – thou shalt be meek, thou shalt be peacemakers, though shalt hunger and thirst for righteousness – Jesus did not present them this way. Jesus presents them as indicatives. He is describing, not commanding. He is painting a picture of what the family of God should look like.

Likewise, in the verses that we dive into today, Jesus does not say, “Be light!” or “Get salty!” He almost says, matter of factly, *“You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world.”* As we prepare to dive into what this means, let us pray...



With these words, Jesus is encouraging us to get out there, to “be” in the world. As I reflect on this charge, it occurs to me that the world is often a big, scary place. I am also reminded that Christ calls us to step out into this world as his representatives. That can be a scary step. It is often a step taken as we go out in mission.

Just over ten years ago, at Youth2011, the national United Methodist youth gathering that happens every four years, I went to a breakout session on youth missions. I happened to sit next to a young man named Carl Gladstone. I went to this session because Steve Hilton and I had agreed to take on a summer church camp – the annual high school mission trip. Carl and I exchanged small talk and I soon discovered that Carl led something called “Motown Missions.” Long story short, Steve and I decided that Detroit would be the destination for 2012’s high school youth mission trip for the Dakotas Conference. We departed in June 2012 with two buses full of excited folks. About a dozen adults and 110 youth were headed to inner city Detroit. I’d guess that for many parents, it was a scary step putting their child on a bus to be part of a mission trip led by two guys from rural South Dakota.

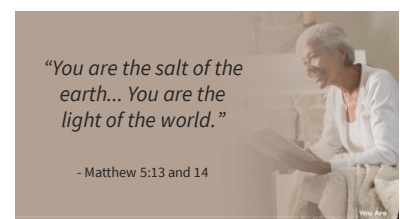


When we pulled up to Metropolitan UMC we saw a beautiful property complete with a gated parking lot. There was barbed wire atop the 6-foot-tall fence.

Across the street from the church was a boarded-up hotel. The bottom two floors were completely sealed up with plywood and the entire property was ringed with six-foot chain link fence with barbed wire on top. Later that evening, during our orientation, one of Carl's very explicit statements was, "Do not go outside at night. Under no circumstances do you go outside at night." He caught my attention. The next day, on Monday morning, in the wee hours of the early morning, I began to make my way to the little table in an alcove that I had decided upon for my quiet time. As I padded around a corner, I surprised a man sitting at a desk. I don't know if I was more surprised or if the armed guard at the desk was more surprised. In that moment of realization I wondered if some parents, upon seeing this odd little scene in Detroit, would've rather kept their kids at home, safe and secure.

Sometimes this is how the world is. Sometimes we wonder if we should take our faith and venture outside. We think maybe we ought to just keep our heads down. Maybe we should just stay behind closed doors. Just to be sure. Just to be safe. You know, safe is a good thing. We invest a lot in being or at least feeling safe. It occupies a lot of our mental bandwidth at times. Yet it never seems to be on Jesus' list of things to worry about. But Jesus does have a list. It's just a list to be concerned about, to pay attention to. But nowhere does safety enter into it. If anything, Jesus is a bit of a risk-taker. "Get on out there," he says. "Go and do." Maybe sometimes "Go and be." That was the core of the Beatitudes, right?

So when Jesus tells us, "*You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world,*" Jesus is describing us here.



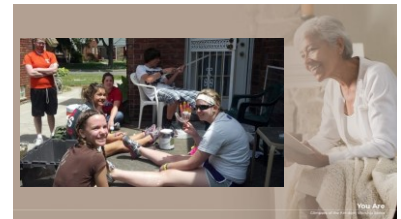
He is not commanding us to be salt or to be light. He is saying, however, that we are to be salt for the world and light for the world. In being light, we are to let the light shine. We cannot make the light shine. We are to let it shine. In the same way, we are to let our faith be salt for the world. We cannot make things salty. Now, maybe if you're like me, you wonder when you became salt for the world, when you became light for the world. Sometimes I think I'm just trying to be me; I'm just trying to share a little Jesus with others. I'm just doing my best, just trying not to get trampled underfoot. 11 years ago, there in Detroit, I can remember thinking that first night as I lay in bed, 'Lord, just get us through the week and home safely.' Yes, Jesus was calling me and us to shine the light of Christ into Detroit, to give light to all we met. Over the course of the week, this is what we did.

Now, here's the thing about light. Light does not exist for its own sake. And what Jesus calls us to isn't about getting people to look at the light, to look at us. When I've fallen into that trap, trying to become the center of attention, then I definitely was not being the light of Christ to others. The light is there to help others to find their way, to shine a light on the path that we are to walk, to reveal some of the hazards that come along the way, and to get where we need to go as Christians – with a minimal of detours.

And salt, just salt, for its own sake is not really a good thing. But as an enhancer, as a preservative – it is invaluable. In the days of Jesus, salt was used in farming. This mineral was mixed right in with the soil to create the best mix for plants to grow. The word translated as "earth" in today's passage would literally be translated as "dirt." Then we'd read the verse this way: "You are the salt of the dirt."

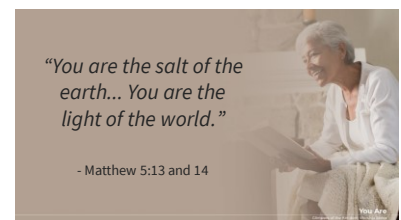
Maybe not a fun place for us to be, but definitely one that helps things to grow. And this is our job: not to be the center of attention, but to help others to grow in their relationship with God.

It was on that trip to Detroit that I began to learn this. Yes, I could have fixed that busted deadbolt in ¼ of the time that it took to walk Kara through how to do it on her own. Yes, it would've been easier to just knock on the door to tell the nervous woman that we were there to do some work on her house. But it was better to coach up Esther and Abby and to send them knocking. Part of our call to be salt and light is to help others to do ministry, to be in service.



Yes, it can be risky. I certainly felt that in the inner city. But we can feel that in Rapid City or in many other places or situations and maybe even in our neighborhoods. It is a loud and dangerous and noisy world out there. We might be safer just keeping our heads down, just sticking to what is comfortable and easy. But we cannot. Jesus tells us that too: *“A city built on a hill cannot be hid.”* That is us: a city on a hill. This is a reminder that we are exposed. We are the representatives of Christ whether we want to be or not. So, my friends, we might as well be good ones. We are the manifestation of Christ in the world, whether we claim it or not.

When Jesus said to us, *“You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world.”* Jesus was telling us that we are his representatives in the world.



The truth is that by claiming to be a part of the church, neighbors and friends and strangers alike will look at us and think “Oh, so that is what it means to be a part of the Christian faith” or “This is what belonging to a church means in terms of how you live your life.” So, brothers and sisters in Christ, let us claim our role. Let us live as though Jesus Christ was alive and well in us.

Jesus tells and asks us, “You are the salt of the earth, why not help things grow? You are the light of the world, why not help folks find their way? Why not mentor, why not lead, why not be what you were called to be, a sign of Christ’s presence in the world?” This little crew was the first of about 10 mission trips that Steve and I led to places all over the US. Going on a mission trip is but one way that we can respond to Jesus’ call to “Get out there.”



There are many ways that we as individuals and we as the church can get out there in the noisy, scary, beautiful, wonderful, glorious world to let the light of Christ shine. We are light when we serve meals on the street and give food boxes to families at the holidays. We visit and we support and comfort in times of loss or illness. We make and send hygiene kits and we collect socks and hats and gloves and Angel Tree gifts for those in need. There are also many ways that we can get out there individually and corporately to enhance this place we call home – to be salt. We offer bike rodeos and garden plots and the Family Fall Festival and VBS. We host celebrations of life and birthday and anniversary gatherings. We host the After School Program and Art with Heart. In each of these events and activities we seek to be light and to be salt for the world.

Let us pause for a moment, to look at verses 17-20. These verses are also part of the “you are” statement. What we have talked about in our time together is the call to go and be Christ out there in the world. Yes, as Methodism founder John Wesley would say, we need to live out the social gospel. Our lives need to be marked by works of mercy – by doing for others, by walking alongside others, by caring for others.



But, as Wesley would also remind us, we are also people of personal holiness. This is what Jesus is talking about in the second part of our passage. “You are” people of the book, people who practice works of piety. We are to know the scriptures and to apply them to our lives. We are to be people who worship and pray, who fast and study the word. When Jesus warns, *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill,”* he is calling both the religious leaders and the common people to a better adherence to God’s will and ways as revealed in the scriptures. Jesus admonishes them and us to know our Bibles, to understand how these words apply to our lives. Towards the end, Jesus makes this observation: *“whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”* We are challenged here to study and know and apply the word of God to our lives, to allow God’s word to be light to our lives and salt to our soul.

You are... salt. You are... light. You are the hands and feet, the heart and love, of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, out there in the world. Wherever we go, seeking to be salt and to be light, we know that the Holy Spirit of Christ is ever with us. So we do not need to worry about being trampled underfoot. As salt and light, we never go alone.

We often go as the community of faith, always sustained, and ever surrounded by the Spirit of God. We are salt. We are light. May it be so this week for you and for me. Amen and amen.

**GPS – Grow, Pray, Study**

- 1) *Grow*. When have you “dared” to take your faith out there into the big, bad world? How did stepping out in faith lead to growth in your faith?
- 2) *Pray*. We are called to help things grow. Who do you know that needs a little of your light or your salt? Pray for guidance and direction to reach this person.
- 3) *Study*. Read Psalm 56. How do these words reassure you and empower you to undertake the challenging call to be salt and light to the world?