

Matthew 5:13-20

“A Thousand Points of Light”

“You are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world.”

As Jesus continues his sermon from the mountain he invites his disciples to see themselves as salt and light. For his listeners, salt and light were essential elements of their lives. Salt added flavour to their food and it was used to preserve meat in a world before refrigeration. Light kept them from stumbling around in the dark. Jesus was calling his disciples to go and make a difference in their world. He was challenging them to work hard at bringing their wisdom, at adding flavour and at preserving their community. In more contemporary terminology, one could say that Jesus was encouraging his disciples to find ways to build resiliency and capacity in their community.

This call to be salt and light, reminds us, once again, that the heart of the life of faith is about service. Right beliefs are good, but for Jesus, living into right relations with all people is the real heart of what it

means to follow him. Jesus had a heart for all people, especially those who lived on the margins of society; the blind, the demon possessed, the leper, the outsider. Jesus call his followers to have a similar heart, one that beats for the oppressed and the forgotten ones.

Wonderful mystical experiences of the divine mystery are important and even essential to the life of faith, but they must always lead us into a deeper engagement with the pain of the world around us. Our times of worship must empower us to find ways to love our neighbour and build a better world for all.

Both are required. We need significant times of worship and connection with the Holy to remind us that it isn't all about us. We are not alone, God is with us. Our worship grounds us and helps us discern what God is asking us to do in this place at this time. Our worship empowers us to not become overwhelmed by the work. Our worship helps to keep us from being discouraged or burnt out and becoming cynical and bitter. We are in this adventure together with God.

Likewise, we need to be engaged in significant ministry in the world around us to also remind us that it isn't all about us. Our service sets us free from our self-centredness and deepens our understanding of who God is and what God is about. We are in this adventure together with our neighbour. Our worship informs our work and our work informs our worship. Worship and work must be one.

My sister-in-law, Sandi, is a fabulous cook. One of the highlights of these past two weeks sitting with my mom in the hospital has been coming home to Sandi's suppers. One day we were out doing some grocery shopping and she needed to pick up some spices. We were all staying at mom's house and I mentioned that I thought mom had some of those same spices at home. Sandi, laughed and said; "You are right, mom does. However, they are so old that they have lost their usefulness." Sandi went on to say that the spices mom had in her cupboard were the exact same spices that Sandi had packed in a box when mom moved from the farm to her new house after dad died

almost twelve years previous. They were still in the same box – never unpacked. My mom and I have an aversion to cooking. Who knew that spices lost their spiciness over time?

This got me thinking about the question Jesus asks in our passage today; “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.” For us, “northerners,” that does not seem all that bad. Salt underfoot makes complete sense because it keeps us from slipping on the ice. However, I don’t really think that was what Jesus was trying to say.

Just as I did not realize that spices over time go stale, I didn’t realize that salt could lose its saltiness. According to Wikipedia, however, salt cannot, in fact, lose its saltiness. It is a very stable compound. It can, however lose its effectiveness when it becomes contaminated with other substances, like dirt.

I have been sitting with that metaphor all week wondering if it has something to say to me as a person of faith and to us as a community of faith. Have I lost my ability to add flavour and to help preserve my world? Has my salt become so contaminated by my personal concerns for other things that it has lost its effectiveness? Have we as a faith community lost our ability to build capacity in our world?

To use the other metaphor that Jesus employed in this passage; has our light grown dim? Have we hidden our light under a bushel basket for so long that it has been extinguished because of the lack of oxygen? How could these things happen and what could we do to prevent them from happening?

The spices in my mother's cupboard lost their effectiveness because she simply stopped using them. Therefore, if we want to maintain our effectiveness as salt and light, then we simply need to keep being salt and light.

It is easy to get distracted by all the cares of our lives. I am too busy to let my light shine. It is also easy to get distracted by our doubts and our fears about whether our simple acts can make any difference in our world. What can I possibly do to bring more peace to our world? However, we must resist these negative voices and commit ourselves to practicing being salt and light in our world.

There is a lot happening in our world today that is discouraging. It would seem almost as if the darkness is winning. A young indigenous woman is hit by a trailer hitch thrown at her by a passing car full of young white men. Six Muslim men are shot to death in their own house of prayer by a young white man. Renewed fighting in the Ukraine pushes a town toward a humanitarian crisis. A president signs an executive order banning the entry of individuals from seven Muslim-majority countries. A president orders all references to “climate change” to be removed from all government websites. A Prime

Minister gives up without a fight any attempt to reform our electoral system. If we focus on the darkness, then it will overwhelm us.

Our world needs us to resist the seductive pull of the darkness and to embrace the light. The world needs us to lay aside our apathy and our fear and rise up and make a difference. The world needs us to practice being light and salt in our world.

Thank you to those among us who stood in solidarity with our Muslim brothers and sisters on Tuesday night here in Thunder Bay. Thank you to those among us who expressed your condolences to the family of yet another young indigenous girl who took her own life. Thank you to those among us who will join the solidarity walk tonight in support of the woman hit by a thrown trailer hitch. Thank you to those among us who help at Shelter House. Thank you to a young Iranian born nurse at the St. Catharines General Hospital who was a beacon of light to frightened elderly woman waiting for surgery to repair her

broken hip. Thank you to all of you who continue to let your light shine in our dark cold world.

More than ever our world desperately needs us to dig deep inside and find the light that is within us and let it shine brightly for the whole world to see. If each of us resists the pull of darkness and finds a way to shine, then our thousands of little lights will keep the darkness at bay for yet another day. More than ever our world desperately needs us to find our salt and bring healing and hope it to our world. If each of resists the pull of fear and apathy and finds a way to be the salt we are called and gifted to be, then we will keep the disintegration of our community at bay and preserve our world for yet another day.

Jesus comes to us today to remind us that we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. We can make a difference. **Amen.**