

“Let It Shine”

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Isaiah 58:1-9

Matt. 5:13-20

“ You all are the salt of the earth, but when seasoning becomes g tasteless,
with what shall it be made savory again?

Why, it is good for nothing, yet even then

it can be thrown out on slippery walkways.”

Matt. 5:13

Let us pray... O God,

We are grateful to be here in Florida and not having to drive

on icy road conditions to get to church this morning –

for those of us who have, we are mindful of its dangers.

But keep us all on the path of loving-kindness

so that we avoid the slippery slope of intolerance.

Amen

So, do you think the Lord had northern winters in mind

when he spoke of how salt is ‘thrown out and trampled underfoot’?

My little joke about salt being used ‘on slippery walkways’

actually has a theological inspiration.

Think of it – salt can be contaminated so that it is no good for
seasoning or other purposes.

Yet by being dissolved in water which is boiled, impurities are separated

and skimmed away, then – after the water has evaporated,

pure salt would again be the result.

Jesus used ‘salt’ as a metaphor for truth that comes from God –

such that no matter how it gets tainted, disguised,

or otherwise hidden, its essence remains the same.

In this case,

‘salt’ stands for God’s truth that is within each of us.

Salt in ancient times, was used as a preservative – not just as a condiment,

but important enough to serve as the basis for paying people.

The word ‘salary’ comes from a root word that means ‘salt’.

So, God has provisioned us with intrinsic worth that

serves as a preservative of who we are

and that part of ourselves that can be shared with others.

Willard, p.2

Jesus also used the metaphor of 'light', again as a figure of speech
to describe God's truth within each of us,
such that we are the 'light of the world'.

Light is the first thing to be created in Genesis;
And in the first chapter of the Gospel of John,
light is said to be equal to "life" – life that is conscious
and aware of itself as in the "light of humanity";
And light is symbolic of knowledge by which we are "enlightened".
Sunlight warms the earth and makes it possible for life to exist
and light enables us to see at night
from wax candles to mercury headlights.

And be seen –
when we let the light of who we are shine from within us,
we are a beacon of welcome for others to do the same.

Jesus used common imagery from everyday life to get his point across
about some fairly complex ideas.

By using 'salt' and 'light', he was describing the truth or character of God
that is as basic as the primary colors of red, yellow, blue,
or the elements of earth, air, fire, and water
or simply that which needs no defense,
because it can't be broken down any further – it just is.

And isn't that what he is saying about each of us –
that we don't have to defend who we are, because... we just are!
And we – as members of a church that is 'open & affirming',
have taken a position to that effect in how we welcome one another .
But to become 'open & affirming' as individuals is trickier.

It is one thing to say we are open to whoever 'they' are as a group,
but to take it to the next step is to be open to individuals
who can be pretty annoying at times;
And that is where our faith gets tested at work, at home, at church.
Seems like it isn't hard at all to be offended in our society –
and that's not even about talking politics.
Think of how people compete for parking spaces, or cut in line somewhere,
or talk loud and rude – and that was just at lasagna dinner!
I'm kidding of course,
but Jesus was speaking to us at this elemental level of life.

Willard, p.3

The Sermon on the Mount – like the 10 Commandments,
addresses not only what is appropriate for our behavior,
but also addresses the internal processes
that shape our attitudes which govern our actions.

The Sermon on the Mount is part commentary on the 10 Commandments
that expands upon them as well as reinterprets them.

It also serves to expand upon the Greatest Commandments –
of loving God, loving others and oneself.

By reorienting a person's attitudes and actions to do what is most loving,
the individual becomes the building block for a transformed society.

The nonviolent protests on the streets of Cairo, Tunisia, India, and Alabama
have their example if not their source in the Sermon on the Mount
as we will see in our exploration together of Jesus' teachings.

Looking at the lives of Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King,
we see that the discipline that arose from a close following of
the Sermon on the Mount was very specific and demanding –
even at the cost of their lives.

This burden of the Law of Love was taken upon by Gandhi and King
and others throughout history as a choice they made
by virtue of what was required by events.

And their example is in sharp contrast with
the discipline of ritual observance that is imposed by others.

The Pharisees of Jesus' day are synonymous with those who enforce
religious values on society, like anti-blasphemy laws,
or some other morality issue –
as opposed to simply leading by example.

They are the hypocrites that Jesus spoke of –
hypo-crites, or hypo-critics, super critics whom Jesus condemned
for tying heavy burdens on others to control rather than inspire.

The Pharisees are still with us –
and we need look no further than the mirror to find them.

But the antidote to being a super critic,
is to be found in Jesus' teachings about a 'righteousness'
that goes beyond ritual conformity
to the rich diversity of justice, peace, and loving-kindness in action.

Willard, p.4

In the words of the Prophet Isaiah, the LORD said,

‘6 Is not this the fast that I choose:

to loose the bonds of injustice... to let the oppressed go free...?

7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,

and bring the homeless poor into your house...?

8 Then your light shall break forth like the dawn...’

Isa 58:6a,7a,8a

So, what about these words? What do we do with them?

Salt? That’s about ‘being yourself’ come what may.

That’s how you keep your balance on the slippery path

passed temptations of what is second best and unworthy of you.

Light? That’s the part of the Good News that has been given to you

to share – and serves as a beacon of welcome,

inviting others to be who they are with you.

The Law? The Law we are talking about is not the external conformity

of spiritually arrogant Pharisees, but the Law of Love –

the Law of Loving-kindness that is already within us

like salt in the sea and starlight to guide us in the evening sky.

So, be salty and let your light shine...

‘This little light of mine, I’m going to let it shine.

This little light of mine, I’m going to let it shine.

This little light of mine, I’m going to let it shine.

Let it shine! Let it shine! Let it shine!’

‘Hallelu-ia! Hallelu-ia!

Hallelu! Hallelu! Hallelu! Hallelu!

Blessed is the name of the Lord!’

‘This little light of mine, I’m going to let it shine...’

Amen

*In our lesson today from Isaiah 58:1-9,
we have an affirmation of God's passion for justice
as an appropriate expression of devotion to God
that is very similar to the message of Micah 6
which asks 'what does the LORD require?'*

[The LORD said,]

- 1 Shout out, do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet!
Announce to my people their rebellion,
to the house of Jacob their sins.
- 2 Yet day after day they seek me and delight to know my ways,
as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness
and did not forsake the ordinance of their God;
they ask of me righteous judgments,
they delight to draw near to God.
- 3 'Why do we fast, but you do not see?
Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?'
Look, you serve your own interest on your fast-day,
and oppress all your workers.
- 4 Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist.
Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high.
- 5 Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself?
Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush,
and to lie in sackcloth and ashes?
Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?
- 6 Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?
- 7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?
- 8 Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator shall go before you,
the glory of the Lord shall be your rearguard.
- 9 Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.

Matthew 5:13-20

[Jesus said:]

“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 under foot.

You are the light of the world.

A city built on a hill cannot be hidden.

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.

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.”

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets;
I have come not to abolish but to fulfil.

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.

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.

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that
of the scribes and Pharisees,
you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Inspired by Matthew 5:13-20

YOU ALL ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH,
BUT WHEN SEASONING BECOMES TASTELESS,
WITH WHAT SHALL IT BE MADE SAVORY AGAIN?
WHY, IT IS GOOD FOR NOTHING, YET EVEN THEN
IT CAN BE THROWN OUT ON SLIPPERY WALKWAYS.

YOU ALL ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD;
A CITY BUILT ON A HILL CANNOT BE HIDDEN.
NO ONE LIGHTS A LAMP AND PLACES IT UNDER A BASKET,
BUT ON A LAMPSTAND, SHINING FORTH
TO ALL THOSE IN THE HOUSE.

IN THIS WAY,
YOUR LIGHT MUST SHINE FORTH
IN THE SIGHT OF ALL HUMANITY
THAT THEY MAY SEE YOUR GOOD WORKS AND PRAISE
FOR YOUR BELOVED GUARDIAN
WHO IS IN THE HEAVENS.

DO NOT ASSUME THAT I CAME TO UNDERMINE
THE LAW OR THE PROPHETS.
I DID NOT COME TO UNDERMINE THEM,
BUT TO AFFIRM THEM.
I AM TELLING YOU THE TRUTH,
NEITHER HEAVEN & EARTH
NOR THE LEAST STROKE OF ANY LETTER OF THE LAW
WILL PASS AWAY BEFORE EVERYTHING THAT IS
SUPPOSED TO HAPPEN, DOES.

THEREFORE,
WHOEVER MAKES A HABIT OF BREAKING THE LAW OF LOVE –
THE LAW OF LOVING-KINDNESS
AND CONVINCES OTHERS TO DO THE SAME,
WILL HAVE LITTLE TO DO WITH
THE BELOVED COMMUNITY OF HEAVEN.
BUT WHOEVER PRACTICES AS WELL AS PREACHES
THE LAW OF LOVING-KINDNESS WILL BE CONSIDERED
A GIANT IN THAT BELOVED COMMUNITY OF HEAVEN.

FOR I TELL YOU THAT UNLESS YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS
EXCEEDS THE LITERAL INTERPRETATIONS OF
THE PHARISEES AND RELIGIOUS EXPERTS,
YOU WILL NOT EVEN ENTER
THE BELOVED COMMUNITY OF HEAVEN.