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 Confirmation Sunday

***Being Salt and Light***  
***Matthew 5:13-20***

*“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.*

*<sup>14</sup> “You are the **light of the world**. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. <sup>15</sup> People do not light a lamp and put it under the bushel basket; rather, they put it 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.*

***The Law and the Prophets***

*<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,<sup>[c]</sup> not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. <sup>19</sup> Therefore, whoever breaks<sup>[d]</sup> 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.*

What does it mean to follow Jesus Christ?

**Who** are we?

And what are we called to **do**?

These are the questions that ***Jesus is trying to answer*** in his Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, as he talks about living out our faith—

And these same questions are just as relevant today as they were then!

We should be asking ourselves—

***what does it mean to be a Christian today?*** In 2023?

The original audience of the Gospel of Matthew was a ***Jewish-Christian*** community, trying to understand what it meant to follow God, after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.

They were asking ***basic questions of identity and faith***.

*Our Confirmation class has been asking these same questions* about identity and faith.

They have taken classes and had different experiences since October, and they have *explored what it means to be a Christian in the world today*. These youth are truly living out their faith, in light of *who* we are and *what we are called to do* in Christ.

*We all know that times have changed.*

*We do not live in a Christian nation*, more and more people are religiously *unaffiliated*, and fewer people are part of a Christian community.

It's *not easy* to be a follower of Jesus today—just ask some of our young people! It takes *effort*, it takes *time*, it takes *commitment*.

Thankfully, that's what they have shown in their hearts and lives.

And that's what we are celebrating today, as we hear these important words of Jesus.

The interesting thing is, times have changed since Jesus said these words, *But the context is very similar today*.

People then were dealing with a Roman occupation,

They were living in a society that did NOT accept their faith,

They had to be strong in their identity, and stand up for their convictions.

Just like we have to do today—in 2023!

Here in Matthew 5, Jesus is preaching his famous Sermon on the Mount, and he has just described *those who are in the kingdom of God*, In the Beatitudes.

Then Jesus goes further.

He describes the *day-to-day life of someone following Him*,

The *decisions* that make up a believer's life.

See, Jesus is preaching for 2 reasons: to *encourage and affirm* his followers, but he is also preaching to *challenge* them.

He is urging us to live faithfully,

to not give up or give into the ways of the world—

a world that is largely hostile to Christian faith.

So in verses 13-20 Jesus gives *practical advice* about who we are to be, and how we are to live.

He says we should be like *salt, and light*.

Two common elements, *given new power and meaning* by Jesus.

### ***Why salt?***

Well, we all know the different properties of salt.

Salt brings *life* to food—it brings out the *flavor* of food.

Ever had a little sea salt on a sweet treat?

Salt brings *variety and interest* to food.

Salt is also used as a *preservative*, to cure foods.

It was literally life-saving for people in Jesus' day.

In Biblical days, salt was also used when making a *covenant or an agreement* with someone. You would each throw some salt over the other person's shoulder!

Salt was a *traded commodity*.

And if someone wanted to cheat another person of a measure of salt, they might dilute it with sand.

Which of course is impossible to undo.

Which might be what Jesus is referring to, when he talks about salt *losing its saltiness*, and being thrown out.

So if salt brings life and flavor---how are we *bringing life* to other people?

Does *your faith* bring life to others?

Are you showing the *love of God* in real ways?

When was the last time you *prayed* with and for someone?

What about *encouraging* them in your speech, or a note, or a phone call?

If salt is a preservative,

*how are we preserving our relationships—with God and one another?*

Are we taking our role as Christians seriously?

Are we *being active in the body of Christ*?

One thing that is so inspiring about this Confirmation Class is that they each one have things *they want to DO as members of this church!*

They are not content to just be names on a roll,

They are not going to just show up from time to time.

They want to be *active in their faith*—helping with the music, drama, streaming services, the food pantry, the Mission commission, the decision-making of the church, and reaching into the community and the world.

What if *we were ALL thinking about how we can live out our faith*—  
Both inside and outside the church?  
*How can YOU do that?*

If salt can be diluted, *our faith too can be diluted* too,  
with the ways and concerns of the world.  
For these young people, they are faced with so many *stresses and struggles* in  
school and peer groups, it takes a lot to stand up for their faith.  
They have to think about *prioritizing their walk* with Christ, and what they allow  
and don't allow into their hearts and minds.

*All of us are in the same boat.*

We can *fill our hearts and minds with junk*—all the horrible news of the world,  
the division, the prejudice, the ignorance---OR we can follow Christ  
and *fill our lives with the good*—like the fruits of the Spirit, like justice, and peace,  
grace, acceptance, love and mercy.  
How are *YOU doing that*—in your faith?

Jesus also says that we *should be like LIGHT*—like a lamp shining, giving light to  
all in the house.

Why would he compare us with light?

Well, light was one of the *most common images* for the people of God.  
The prophet Isaiah repeatedly speaks about God's people as light.

When Jesus talks about the light of a lamp, illuminating an entire house—people at  
the time would have been able to *picture that kind of light* in their home.

A single candle or flame would illuminate the whole house.

It *seems obvious* to say you shouldn't hide it under a basket,

But Jesus is talking about the light in our lives—

*And how often do we fail to let that light shine?*

How often do we *not use* our gifts for God?

How often do we *shy away* from sharing God's good news?

*How are YOU letting the light of Christ shine in your life?*

We know that *light is powerful because it brings life*—

the light of the sun helps creation grow and flourish.

Light brings *clarity*, it helps us find what is lost.

Light brings *direction and safety*—

like a *lighthouse* giving direction to ships in the night.

Light *reveals things* that are hidden,  
things that people might want to hide or forget.  
Light is *needed in the darkness*.

Light is *powerful* for so many reasons,  
And especially powerful when *it's shining in the dark*.  
We have a much greater appreciation for the stars,  
when we see them in a dark sky, right?

I can already see how these Confirmation students are light in the world.  
They are *shining what they have learned* and who they know Jesus to be.  
They realize that the *Holy Spirit is within them*,  
helping them to follow Jesus Christ.

See-- *light can originate within*, like with the sun, or it can be *reflected*.  
In the Upper Room devotional this week, Douglas Brown talked about the beauty  
of stars in a dark sky.  
He noted that the constellations and planets we see today are those that have been  
seen by humans for thousands of years.  
The people in Jesus' day saw the stars, just like we do.  
And he writes about how the objects that *appear the brightest*,  
like the moon and planets like Venus and Jupiter,  
*do not actually produce light* in themselves—  
but rather they *REFLECT the light of the sun!*

Now think about that for a minute.  
What if we shine the brightest,  
not because of *who we are, but because of who WE REFLECT?*  
Not because we have life figured out, or we can make our own light,  
But because we *reflect the light of God?*  
We reflect the love of Jesus? The Son of God!  
All by the *power of the Holy Spirit* within us!

***What does that mean in YOUR life?***

It's actually amazing to think about—  
we don't have to come up with anything on our own to help others,  
We just have to *allow the Holy Spirit* to be at work in us!  
To help us shine the love of Jesus Christ!  
How can you *allow that to happen in YOUR life?*

After he urges us to be like salt and light, Jesus says in verses 17-20:  
*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets;  
 I have come **not to abolish but to FULFILL.***

One of the most *common complaints about Jesus* was that he was teaching *against* the laws of God.

The religious authorities thought he was teaching something *new and dangerous, and steering people AWAY from the faith!*

In reality, he was just *taking their faith to a new level.*

A *deeper, more meaningful* faith in God.

That's why he says he has not come to abolish the law, but to *fulfill* it.

If we are called to be salt and light,

Aren't we also called to *follow and fulfill God's law?*

What does that mean in our lives?

The Confirmation class studied the *10 commandments*, with the first four being about our relationship with *God*, and the last six being about our relationship with *one another*.

We also studied the *Great Commandment* of Jesus—the summary of the law—to love God and your neighbor as yourself.

Why did we study God's law?

Well, because it *still applies today*.

Jesus didn't take it away because it's in the Old Testament, or its old history—he made it *even more meaningful, and easier to understand*.

We follow God's laws today because the Bible is *one whole history* of our faith. All of it is important to us.

This is what was so meaningful about going to *Shabbat service together at Temple Shalom*, and worshipping with our Jewish friends—listening to the Hebrew, the laws, the rituals. We even got a tour of their precious Torah scrolls.

Truth is, Judaism is also *OUR faith, our ancestry, our people*.

Jesus helps us as Christians to understand God's laws, and the Holy Spirit helps us to follow them.

For many people today, the word *law or obedience means something negative*. We think of what we should *NOT do*.

Obedience seems to be all about  
the *thou shalt not*s in the 10 commandments,  
or all the things that *Jesus preaches against* in his sermons.

But what if obedience is *something deeper than what to AVOID in life?*  
What if obeying God, and following Jesus, is about *finding and preserving life.*  
Like *salt, and light.*

What if instead of saying that we should *obey God,*  
we said, *let's make a difference in the world!*  
Let's *make the world a better place!*  
Because isn't that the *point?*  
Isn't that what Jesus wants from us? As Salt and Light?  
Isn't that the meaning of *life in the kingdom* of God?

Here at the end of the passage, *Jesus critiques the Pharisees.*  
Which is interesting, because they cared deeply about God's law and obeying it.  
They were *highly respected Jewish leaders.*

But at the time of Jesus, the Pharisees had *different opinions* about how to deal  
with the Roman occupation.  
Some of them wanted to rebel against Rome.  
Others want to retreat into Judaism,  
and *preserve their Jewish identity, ignoring the world around them.*  
These Pharisees cared so much about their own private religious life and identity,  
that they *ignored living in the world.*  
They were *not being salt and light,* as Jesus urges us to do.  
They were keeping their faith to themselves.

And Jesus says, *God is doing a new thing*—preserving religious identity is not  
enough, that's like putting your light under a basket.  
Or being diluted salt.  
Instead, we have to *let our faith shine in the world.*

*Jesus knew God's law and followed it.* He just did it from a different perspective.  
He didn't read God's law as what NOT to do,  
He read it in the *context of the kingdom of God*—the kingdom he describes all  
throughout his Sermon on the Mount.  
He read God's law and *took it to new levels, new meaning, and new application.*  
Edwin Van Driel, *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Volume 1, pg. 337

What if we are called to *do something similar?*  
To read the Bible, and take it to new levels,  
with *deeper meaning, and real-life application?*

I have to admit that's one of the *main reasons I preach*—  
my prayer is to make God's Word *accessible* to everyone,  
and *relevant for daily living*.

We should leave worship—changed. Doing a new thing.

It's what we *talked so much about in Confirmation class*—how our faith changes  
our lives, and what we do on a daily basis.

It's not enough to just have the *head knowledge* of God.

We must have the *heart-knowledge*.

It's not enough to just *know* faith, or *say* it,

We have to *LIVE it*.

Our faith should *inform everything we say and do*.

People should know we are *Christians*, as the song says, *by our love*.

That's ultimately what it means to be *salt and light* in this world.

And that is the *Good News* of the Gospel today.

*We can be salt*—bringing *life* to everyone around us.

*We can be light*—bringing *life, clarity, direction, and illumination* in the  
darkness.

May we all be *the salt and light that can change hearts and lives*.

And all God's people said, Amen.