

The Difference Disciples Make

Matthew 5:13-16

Criminologists tell us no person enters and exits a room without leaving something of themselves behind. There will be a fingerprint, a footprint, a trace of hair, a thread of clothing or some other DNA evidence that we have been there and done that.

On our way to Holy Communion today, I want to raise a few questions with you who are seeking to be disciples of Jesus Christ:

What kind of footprints are you leaving on the sands of time? What difference will it make that you have crossed the stage of life? How will you be remembered?

Disciples follow Christ. Disciples love one another. Day-by-day disciples try to make a difference in their world! That is the point of Jesus' simple similes that form the scripture reading for today. You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world

Let's unpack these two little simple statements so that we may find direction of being salt and light for our world and our day.

Before I was big enough to read the Bible, I knew the meaning of that statement. Salt of the earth people lived in our community. They were moral, stable, dependable, solid people who had as much concern for others as they had for themselves.

My grandfather, a far from perfect man, was a salt of the earth kind of person. He had to quit school in the eighth grade and go to work to help take care of his family. At 26 he married, and together he and my grandmother built their life and family. He could borrow money on a handshake, cut a deal on his word, and come Sunday he went to church. He was as honest as the day is long, as straight as an arrow, as moral as any man who ever walked the face of the earth.

If the world were full of people like my grandfather, police would be bored, the banks could fire their regulators, businesses could lay off their collection agencies, and the IRS wouldn't need auditors. Sometimes I wonder, what will the world be like if salty people lose their saltiness?

Salty people preserve society. Salt was to the ancient world what canning, packaging, and refrigeration is to our world.

You can't walk down the streets of Old Jerusalem without a leg of lamb slapping you in the face, or a salted fish looking you in the eye. Salt kept meat from spoiling. Without it all of life became rotten and rancid.

The first disciples had no problem getting the point. You, my disciples, are the salt of the earth, the preservers of society. There are some questions, it seems to me, that salty people ought to be asking in our day. Sometimes we get used to things that I'm not so sure are good things to get used to.

Occasionally, somebody ought to be asking the questions of meaning behind our madness. Just because we can do it, does that mean we should do it? Where does knowledge gain wisdom? Where does drive engage discernment?

Salty people ask questions like “Is it better to be lucky than it is to be responsible?” From game shows to church bingo’s, the world has gone crazy over the hope of getting something for nothing.

Salty people ask the question “Can the rich ignore the poor and ever be secure?” Most of the time you and I live in a world of work and commerce. It is a world that honors people for being attractive and productive. It reveres winners and scorns losers. It rewards independence and deplores dependence. Most of us have done quite well in that world.

We have a very hard time believing that everybody else is not just like us. But they are not. Not everyone has your intelligence. Not everyone is fortunate enough to have your health. Not everyone got the breaks that you have gotten in life. Not everyone has the same family background that you have. Not everybody has a spouse who has helped make you what you are today.

That is why we must hear the cry of the needy. Those voices lead us to compassion, not competition. They teach us to connect through sacrifice and self-restraint, not survival of the fittest. They teach us to win in this world by helping our neighbors and sharing with them rather than finding their weaknesses and defeating them. Salty people ought to ask those kinds of questions.

Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth.” You don’t have salt, you don’t spread salt, you don’t share salt, you don’t buy salt, you don’t acquire salt, you ARE the salt of the earth.

The second simile is like the first. YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD. A city set on a hill shall not be hidden.

Some people will never find their way home to God. Some people will never be rescued from a stormy sea. Some people will never land safely on the other side, unless our feeble lamps are burning bright. You are the light of the world. Jesus said, “Let your light shine before people that they may see your good deeds and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

Think of this for a moment. The sheer idea that a carpenter telling a group of fishermen in remote Galilee that they could enlighten the world by faithful discipleship seems absurd. Except that we happen to know, it’s true. What appeared to be comic became cosmic and we are Christian today because of their faithfulness and their taking these words seriously.

Autumn Fletcher says, “When I was a kid I dreamed of changing the world. I believed I could end starvation, eliminate drug abuse, find a cure for cancer. In my imagination I made a perfect world where people didn’t suffer and nobody went hungry. I never figured out how to do that. Slowly I realized, if God didn’t make the world perfect, I probably couldn’t either. So now I am content to make a difference day by day. Sometimes it is a laugh, often it’s a hug, and occasionally, it is a word of encouragement. Yet I know God is using my small gestures to touch the hearts of others.”

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

If we can help somebody as we travel along, If we can cheer somebody with a word or a song,

If we can keep somebody from traveling wrong, Then our living will not be in vain.

If you are looking for a place where you can travel with other disciples and make a difference in the lives of others, then meet with me downstairs during the ministry fair or give me a call this week and see how you can become a part of this band of Christ followers. You are the salt of the earth; a city set on a hill.