

Give Light to All

Matthew 5: 13-20

It has been a while since I have stepped into this pulpit to bring you a Word from Scripture. Lots of things have happened since I last stepped into this pulpit, lots of things have happened for us as a church and lots of things have happened in our own individual lives. It is almost as if today is a new beginning for us as Midway Christian and me as your minister. An ironic place to be after almost five years of ministry with you.

But this new place, this new beginning kind of leaves me at a disadvantage because I don't know exactly what the other ministers have said while I was gone so I don't know where to pick up where they left off in the biblical story. It is like that game we used to play as children: One person would start a story and we would go around the circle, and everyone would add a line. But I'm not sure what my next line is in our story together? Once again, an ironic place to be for a minister who has been serving this church for almost five years.

So I thought it would be best if we started a new beginning and our Scripture today gives us the perfect opportunity to do just that. It is a word of renewal. It is a word to revive us as people of faith. It is a word of recommitment for our faith

journeys. And most importantly, it is a reminder of our calling as disciples of Christ here on earth.

In our text from Matthew, we get a very familiar text because all the Gospels have this conversation about salt and light in some sort of form. We easily remember the reference to salt but our memory gets a little foggy when it comes to the light part. We remember Jesus saying “I Am the Light of the World” but are trying to rack our brains on the whole us being the light to the world part. But obviously he said it, but the whole us being a light to the world is a part that we don’t remember as well as other parts or images when Jesus is talking about the Kingdom of God.

as I reflected over this text this week, I wondered why it was so easy for us to remember Jesus us calling us to be the salt of the earth and harder for us to remember that Jesus also calls us to be that whole “Light to the world” thing. And I think that the answer to this question is just that: it is easier to be salt of the earth, adding flavor and spice to life, rather than being a Light to the world, shining always, standing as a beacon in a world surrounded by darkness, , providing comfort, and yes, always on for all to see and experience.

So why is that? I have to realize that it is easier for us to understand the whole salt metaphor in terms of faith because we’ve experienced the spice of life that comes through an enriched spiritual life and a close connection to a

community of faith. The whole salt metaphor translates so well to our spiritual and everyday lives. It is easy to grasp. We know that any good chef will tell us and probably any good doctor will tell us as well, that a little bit of salt goes a long way. Too much salt and the dish is ruined. Too much salt and our blood pressure goes up quite a bit. So we know to do the salt thing in moderation in our everyday lives and we can see the benefit from doing the salt thing in moderation in our spiritual lives as well.

We know that in terms of faith, when we talk about being the salt of the earth, this can mean sharing our gifts, adding a little flavor to the mix and then let the Spirit do its thing. When we carry the salt metaphor even further in terms of our faith, we understand that salt doesn't stand on its own. It mixes with the other spices and enhances the dish just like when it comes to our spiritual gifts. We know that we cannot do this whole church thing on our own so we add our spiritual gifts, our own unique flavors to the mix we call church, and we build up the Body of Christ. We also understand that too much of one particular gift to the mix will lead to the whole spiritual gift flavor being out of wack, and our flavorful, spicy, life-enhancing Body of Christ mix of a dish can be ruined and yes, even we will admit that unbalance of flavors happens, unfortunately, our blood pressures go up and our flavor-filled, spicy, life-enhancing Body of Christ mix based on unity and community begins to break down.

We get the delicate balance of salt and flavors when it comes to our faith but following this same line of thought, can there really be too much light? Can too much light throw off the mix of life? I'm sure my eye doctor would say yes, too much light can damage our eyes, too much light can burn us, too much light can leave us damaged. And after much reflection, I have come to the conclusion that although too much light can damage our everyday lives, there can never be too much light when we are talking about light in terms of spiritual and our faith.

You see, when Jesus used this metaphor about us being a light of the word and for the world, Jesus understood that there was artificial light and then there was true light, there was commercial light that shapes the world around us and then there is God's light that strengthens us and guides us. There is false light found in the empty promises that this world gives when it says and encourages us to do more, be more, buy more, than we will be happy, and then there is the True Light that promises comfort, security, and more importantly hope

The light that Jesus is talking about can only come from the God, the true light, the original light, the light that no person can create or duplicate, no matter how hard we try, that light that touched our lives and inspires us to shine always, as beacons of hope and comfort in a world that is covered in darkness.

This is the light that we are always supposed to reflect, the light of God that separated the light from darkness, that separated and calmed the chaos, that was

given to us as gift through the birth, life and death of Jesus Christ. The light that transformed our lives and first beckoned us out of the darkness. The light that fills us with hope and peace. The light that even death could not extinguish.

This is the light that we are called to shine. This is the light that we are called to show, live and breathe every minute of every day of our lives. This is the True Light of God that becomes stronger when we claim and proclaim God's goodness throughout the whole earth. This is the light that chases away the doubts of sin and sadness away from our world. This is the light that energizes and renews the life-giving, flavorful, spicy mix that we call the Body of Christ. This is the light that we are supposed to reflect to show the world as disciples of Christ that God is still working, that God is still doing, that God has the last word.

When we look at this text in the Gospel of Matthew, we need to realize that this word of renewal and recommitment is part of the Sermon on the Mount, a new beginning as well for Jesus and his ministry. A crowd has gathered around him and he is teaching and sharing images, ideas, about the Kingdom of God. He is talking to the crowd, telling them that God is still working in the world, that God is still doing in this world. He is describing the Kingdom of God in terms of the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those that mourn, blessed are the meek, blessed are those that hunger, blessed are those who are pure in heart....Blessed are those....Jesus is giving comfort and hope to the crowd, to a

people who live in a world filled with chaos, to children of God who need a word of hope but he can tell that the crowd has heard it all before, has heard all these promises before from others who proclaimed to come in the name of the Lord. So following these Beatitudes which are addressed to the crowd, Jesus turns his attention to his disciples and his tone changes.. He reminds his disciples that although he is blessing the crowd and trying to get them to understand that this world does not have the last word, the way the blessings are going to happen and one of the ways that God continues to have the last word in this world is through the disciples and their ministry. They are called to be the Body of Christ here on earth. They are called to “take the imitative and rather than hide from the world or adapt to the world, to live lives that reflect the hopeful trust that can only be found through God. He is telling the disciples when he calls them salt of the earth and for them to be a Light to the world, that what they do really matters and has significance beyond their comprehension. And through their actions, their ministry, their compassion, their preaching, their teaching, praise and glory will be given to God because people will begin to see, believe and trust in the True Light, the True promises, in the True security and will experience hope and peace that can only be found through God’s grace and God’s goodness.

When Jesus talks about being salt of the earth and being a light of the world, he is telling them that they have a purpose and a mission. And when they forget or lose that mission, when they think it is easier to conform to the world rather than comfort the world, it is almost as if they have lost their saltiness and have hidden their light and what good is salt that isn't salty? And what good is light that remains hidden?

Jesus wants the disciples and us to understand today that our calling as disciples is not supposed to be lived out when it is convenient for us or when we can fit it in. Our calling as disciples is part of our whole life, part of everything that we do, from the time we wake up in the morning until the time we go to sleep at night, we are disciples of Christ. We are called to shine. We are called to offer comfort and hope to all of God's people. We are called to reflect the true light of God for all people. We are always supposed to be on, our light always shining as a beacon of hope for this world, not hidden under a basket.

And Jesus never said it was going to be easy. Jesus didn't promise us that everything would go our way when we embraced our mission and purpose as lights of and for this world. Jesus didn't promise us that everyone would like what we say or do when we accept the call to be beacons of hope in a world surrounded by darkness.

And that's okay because what Jesus did promise us is that we would never be alone. What he did promise us is that God will always guide us and lead us. What he did promise us is life that is so much better than this world could ever offer. What he did promise us is that we will be blessed through God's grace, God's love, God's mercy, God's peace, blessings that are so much more and better than this world could ever offer us.

When Jesus calls us to be salt of the earth and a light of the world and to the world, he is remind us that that we are called to live out our faith, to be examples, to be symbols of hope and light to a world that is hurting that is broken, that is in need of some good news, and to hold firm in the promises that God is in control.

And that is a wonderful place to start and continue our ministry as Midway Christian Church.

May we be renewed and refreshed. May we shine like lights to and for this world. May we share our flavor-filled spicy mix with the Body of Christ and see what God has in store for us. Amen.