

.Year A

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time

Matthew 5:13-20

“Being Reminded”

This is one of those very familiar passages in the liturgy of the Christian Church.

So familiar in fact, that it is the name of a benevolent organization here in the Champaign Urbana area, “Salt and Light” has claimed it to express it’s mission to our community.

However, that is one of the things about the Lectionary that I love so much, it makes the pastor have to return to the basics of Jesus’s teachings on a regular basis.

We are being reminded of who we are called to be.

Of what our mission is and how we always need to be aware of that.

We are being reminded of our mission in a time that seasonally we all need to be reminded from where our hope comes from, and that we ARE hope.

Thank goodness this past week we have had a break from the gloom of cloud cover.

Yes, it's been cold, but I have welcomed being able to drive home after work in that magical orange, setting sun light.

I have welcomed being warmed by the sun.

This is "Ordinary Time", we have put away our Christmas festivities, and we are not yet into the contemplative season of Lent.

We are being reminded that we are the salt of the earth, we are the light of the world.

These words are used to describe solidness.

As in, "what holds the world together".

As in, preserving, "keeping things from going bad".

And it's not, "you should be", salt and light, but you are salt and light, ready or not!

Preservation and light, clarity, being able to see things clearly.

These themes are so common, used so frequently, but yet, we need to be reminded.

I have learned too that salt does the opposite of it's flavor profile.

Salt makes a chocolate chip cookie sweeter.

Salt controls the yeast from overdoing it in breadmaking.

So the saying could also be that We are there to bring out the good, the sweet of life.

I have thought a lot about being "salt" in a community.

And My understanding is that it's being in touch with the values and acting on those values that hopefully holds the community together, encouraging healthy functioning.

Be it honesty, or ensuring that resources are used for the common good, or that all citizens are given good educations and healthcare.

That all are able to access what makes them thrive, be it a well stocked grocery store or access to transportation.

We all hope that is what the church does.

That the church is a reminder, and example and a power of putting people first.

First Champaign really can't help but be that here in Champaign.

After all, we are on Church Street and this is what a church is supposed to look like, stained glass, bell tower, and active ministries.

And it seems that not a week goes by that we see and hear the need to for our practice of treating all with respect and love is sorely needed.

I don't need to remind you of mass shootings targeting the Asian American community or of brutality toward the black community.

I want to bring this closer this morning, into our day to day struggles at work of doing the right thing.

Of how, in our work places, do we think about doing the right thing, or pushing for the right thing, rather than following the rules.

History has a way of helping us to look at our short comings, but, history also helps us see when we have been on the right side of history too.

I think for a long time, we have looked at the church as being the upholder of the status quo, of upholding the morals that seem to be important at the moment.

This is one reason I really appreciate the Presbyterian Church, USA.

I was privileged to be a commissioner for this Presbytery for last Summer's GA.

And, I was blown away by how many committees and how many issues we commissioners were asked to have an opinion on, to vote on and to amend.

We Presbyterians don't want to pass anything unless we feel pretty good about it.

And so we amend, we improve, we want to be more specific.

We go back and forth.

Amendments are passed by huge majorities or get by with only a few votes.

For the most part, I was really impressed with the civility.

Of saying truthful things in disagreement in calm ways.

However, I was also impressed with the leadership that we, as a denomination has.

All were lead with a sense of humility and of wanting to keep in mind always, how these decisions were affecting people.

It was of looking at who had the power.

How to distribute the power.

How to be aware of where the power lies.

Because this is how we as a church become relevant to be the salt and light of the world.

Now here's the hard part, we voted on some amazing statements on climate change and on race relations and on other issues.

And the hope is that we will take these actions and statements and really DO something with them.

Because people outside of our buildings are watching us, seeing if what we say we believe and what we do are really the same thing.

We lost the singer David Crosby a few weeks ago

One of the members of Crosby, Still, Nash and Young, which looking at many of you, you probably know some of his songs by heart.

David Crosby was not always known for his righteousness or his saltiness.

But yet,

I became aware of some of his lyrics that showed his struggle with the problem of wanting to be salt, but understanding how hard it can be.

Of wondering if all the work and the good words really make a difference.

One of his later songs is titled Dangerous Night and it goes like this:

Now some small parts seem right, scattered here and there

One smiling face in a crowd that's angry and scared

Can't seem to see where it doesn't get worse

It's like one good thought getting lost in an angry verse

I try to write Buddah (or Christ) and it comes out guns



I vote for peace and the blood still runs

I want to believe I can pass happy to my child

But the truth gets lost and the system runs wild.

Send me someone who has doubts about it

Who has conquered their own fear and lived to tell about it

Someone who won't give up in the frozen rain

Who'll walk right next to me through the orchards and the grain

So maybe Crosby had some insight into being Salt of the  
Earth.

That we all have pieces of the good that guides us, that north star  
even though sometimes we wonder how it's all going to turn out  
when we hear about wars, and floods and fires and mass  
shootings.

But doesn't it really help when we have the church to uphold us  
when we wonder how this is all going to come together?

We still know that there is a more perfect way.

That we do want to and believe in the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That we really do care and love the world

We will be celebrating communion soon.

And we believe that as we celebrate communion, all of the saints of the church are celebrating with us.

Those who have been salt of the earth to us.

Who have given us the salt that we have needed to be that peaceful person in a room full of fear.

In India, there is a story of a kind, quiet man who would pray in the Ganges River every morning.

One day after praying, he saw a poisonous spider struggling in the water.

He cupped his hands around the spider to carry it ashore.

As he placed the spider on the ground, it stung him.

Unknowingly, his prayers for the world diluted the poison.

The next day, the same thing happened.

On the third day, the kind man was knee deep in the river, and, sure enough, there was the spider, legs frantic in the water.

As the man went to lift the creature yet again, the spider said, "Why do you keep lifting me?

Can't you see I will sting you every time, because that is what I do."

And the kind man cupped his hands about the spider, replying, "Because that is what I do".

And that is what we do.

We pray, we pray for God's justice to be done.

And we act on our compassion for others.

We bear witness to the hurts of the world.

Some may say that we are a sorry lot because we are not just thinking of how to get ahead, but it is the same beauty as berries or crocus breaking through the snows and mud of spring.

It is what quietly feeds the world.

After all, berries do not have any sense of purpose or charity, They are not altruistic or self sacrificing.

They simply grow to be delicious because that is what they do.

As for us, if things fall, we will reach for them.

If things break, we will try to put them together.

If loved ones cry, we will try to soothe them – because that is what we do.

And we do because we have the Holy Spirit guiding us, loving us and strengthening us.

Amen.