

First Presbyterian Church  
Summer of Love: Salt and Light  
September 2, 2018  
Rev. Catherine Oliver

Our scripture lesson for this morning is a continuation of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Large groups of people had begun to follow Jesus. So he went up a mountain side, kind of like Moses, and then he sat down to teach which all great Rabbis did in that day, they sat down to teach. As Jesus looked out upon the crowd, he probably saw some people he knew and saw a lot of people he didn't know, but what he saw were people that needed some kind of good news. And so he offered a series of special blessings to the ones who had followed him. A really big Kingdom of God (KOG) type of blessing directed toward ordinary people just like you and me. People who sometimes felt hurt and sometimes hurt others. People who sometimes struggle just to pay bills and sometimes have a little extra change to give to those in need.

Jesus' blessings went out to the people who were grieving and those who were trying to make peace with their families or make peace with themselves.

Well in today's lesson Jesus offers two KOG blessings to his followers. Listen for the Good News for us this day.

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.

"You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. 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 fulfill. 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.

The word of the Lord.

Several weeks ago I read about various churches throughout the country who have started blogs encouraging parishioners to post stories about blessings that have occurred during their day. Some churches encourage others to go on their Facebook page and post what they call, "God Sightings" where again people are encouraged to share how someone has been a blessing or light to them as well as posting how they have been a blessing to another person during the week.

I check out a few of the sites and read some touching stories.

One story told about a stranger helping an elderly widow change her flat tire in the middle of rush hour traffic.

Another post talked about a someone who stayed late at work comforting a co-worker who was going through chemotherapy treatments. Then three mons later that person was diagnosed with breast cancer and the co-worker was now there to be a comfort and blessing for her.

Both stories were touching. Both stories along with others I read reminded me of how important it is to be KOG salt and light kind of people.

In God's great providence and mystery, I believe that we somehow find one another at just the right moment in time, where we can truly be a source of light and comfort to one another. But it is important to pay attention, be alert or we miss the moment at hand!

This week I had one of those sightings right in my own neighborhood. But before I share that story, let's review what Jesus was actually saying when he was describing

his followers as salt and light.

It is important to notice that when Jesus was speaking to his followers on the mount he did not say, you are like the salt of the earth, you are like the light of the world.

Rather he was defining the essence of who these people are as his followers. You ARE the salt of the earth. You ARE the light of the world.

Jesus was reaching out to people who didn't understand that they were loved by God. They had not experienced blessings of wealth or even basic human needs.

In antiquity it was believed that those who faithfully followed the letter of the law were blessed by God. God's blessings included health, wealth and often positions of power.

But Jesus was disrupting this understanding of God's blessings.

Jesus was telling these followers that they are the salt preserving agents of the Kingdom of God! They are the light that God is using to draw others to a kingdom of justice and compassion.

To be the salt of the earth means to be a follower of God that doesn't give up when times get tough. Salt of the earth people stay strong, continuing to follow the ways of Jesus through action. Salt of the earth people speak out at risk of their own lives, for the least of these: making sure that justice is procured, human dignity is protected and all people are respected and cared for.

Jesus also said that his followers were the light of the world.

He said: You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. So let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory

to your Father in heaven.

Now some people misunderstand what it means when Jesus says to let your light shine before others. Like this story I heard about an over-zealous Sunday School teacher who was running late for church. This is how the story goes:

A person was being tailgated by a stressed out woman on a busy boulevard. Suddenly, the light turned yellow, just in front of him. He did the right thing, stopping at the crosswalk, even though he could have beaten the red light by accelerating through the intersection.

The tailgating woman was furious and honked her horn, screaming in frustration as she missed her chance to get through the intersection.

As she was still in mid-rant, she heard a tap on her window and looked up into the face of a very serious police officer. The officer ordered her to exit her car with her hands up. He took her to the police station where she was searched, finger printed, photographed, and placed in a holding cell. After a couple of hours, a policeman approached the cell and opened the door. She was escorted back to the booking desk where the arresting officer was waiting with her personal effects.

He said, "I'm very sorry for this mistake. You see, I pulled up behind your car while you were blowing your horn, flipping off the guy in front of you, and cussing a blue streak at him. I noticed the 'What Would Jesus Do' bumper sticker, the 'Choose Life' license plate holder, the 'Follow Me to Sunday-School' bumper sticker, and the chrome-plated Christian fish emblem on the trunk, Naturally... I assumed you had stolen the car."

Yikes. This person had lost her light of kindness and patience, as we all do from time to time.

Carl Jung taught that the brighter the light the bigger the shadow, which is what I suspect happened in this case. How often do we try to present our best selves to the world? We flow out with a bright light when deep down our shadow side of judgement, anger or impatience overshadowed our true light?

Driving to the grocery store this week I saw a neighbor pulling into his driveway. He is an across the alley neighbor that I'd never met. I've had harsh feelings toward him because he and his roommates tend to throw their trash over their back fence into the ally without putting it in their garbage pail. Animals get into their trash scattering it all over the alley and often onto our property.

I pulled my car over and introduced myself. "Hi , I'm Catherine and I'm your across the alley neighbor. Can we talk?"

Graham introduced himself. I came straight to the point. "Could you help me out with a garbage issue?" I told him that my husband and I had cleaned up their garbage multiple times but that now we really can't keep doing it anymore. I said we need for you to put your trash in the bin and help keep the alley cleaned up.

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Graham apologized and told me that his father had died recently and he is trying to become more responsible. He became teary eyed and promised to clean up his trash and be sure his roommates did as well. Then he asked if he could give me a hug.

Jesus longs for us to be salt and light kind of people, rather than people who hold grudges. In all honesty, if I had not been preparing for this sermon, I'm not sure that I would have pulled up to talk to this neighbor.

I was too busy judging him instead of taking the opportunity to meet him. But Christ calls us to be salt and light people. And when we are open, God will provide ways for us to be united with our neighbors in ways that demonstrate the KOG to our world and even to ourselves!

Let it be so!