

Let Your Light Shine!

[Read Matthew 5:13-20 NRSV]

¹³“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. ¹⁴“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶In 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.

¹⁷“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. ¹⁸For 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. ¹⁹Therefore, 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. ²⁰For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Opening Image

Are you familiar with the phrase, “*She is the salt of the earth?*”

Today, when we refer to a person as “the salt of the earth,” we generally mean this in a favorable way. Such people are humble, devoted, loyal, and honest. They are hard-working folks who add value to the lives of others.

Are you familiar with the phrase, “*A city on the hill?*” John Winthrop used this phrase when he spoke to the first Pilgrims about

their religious duties and responsibilities before landing on Plymouth Rock.

Ronald Reagan made the phrase famous saying that the United States of America is the city on the hill. Reagan said, "I've always had a great affection for the words of John Winthrop, delivered to a small band of Pilgrims on the tiny ship Arabella off the coast of Massachusetts in 1630: 'We shall be a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us, so that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a byword throughout the world.'

Well, America has not been a story or a byword. That small community of Pilgrims prospered and, driven by the dreams and, yes, by the ideas of the Founding Fathers, went on to become a beacon to all the oppressed and poor of the world."

Summary

John Winthrop and Ronald Reagan were quoting our scripture text to speak about the duties and responsibilities of people living in a country and a nation built on religious freedom. What does the Bible say about the duties and responsibilities of the first disciples?

Narrative Intro

In our scripture, this morning Jesus goes up to the top of a mountain like Moses receiving the Law from God. The difference is while Moses received the Law, Jesus clarifies the Law given to Moses because Jesus is God. Jesus wants his disciples to know God's will for their lives.

Disciples leave the crowd

Jesus begins by preaching to a crowd of potential followers. "When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him" (Matt 5:1). When the disciples made the decision to go to him [Jesus] they were leaving the crowd and aligning themselves with Jesus.

Being a disciple is not easy

Jesus then addresses the disciples directly saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:3). The opening part of the sermon ends with, "Blessed are **you** when people insult **you**, persecute **you**, and falsely say all kinds of evil against **you** because of me" (Matt 5:11). When Jesus uses the word, **you**, he is getting personal. Being a disciple or follower of Jesus is not going to be easy. In fact, the disciples will face persecution for being different from the world.

Beatitudes

Jesus tells this early Christian community that they are blessed to have the poor, the mournful, the meek, the hungry, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and the persecuted as part of their community. These people have experienced loss, arrogance, hunger, thirst, homelessness, strife, and persecution. They are the ones who will be enabled by the Holy Spirit to: feed the hungry, welcome the homeless, give water to the thirsty, resist violence with non-violence, and endure persecution.

Example to the world

Jesus told this new community that they are to be an example to the rest of the world. They are called to be the salt and light of the world. Both terms were used metaphorically to illustrate how the people of God were to stand out from the rest of the world and impact others in a positive way.

Salt

First let us take a look at salt. Salt played a major role in Old Testament culture. Jesus used this salt metaphor because the many uses of salt were familiar to the people. Salt was used for seasoning, as a preservative, as a disinfectant, as a unit of exchange, and numerous other things.

Seasoning

People used salt to bring out the flavor of foods. Jesus compared his followers to salt to indicate that they were to add flavor, or seasoning, to society. Christians should not just blend in with everyone else in the world. If Christians make no effort to change the world for the better then they are of no use to God. By teaching God's truth and ministering to others, disciples can make life better for all.

Preservative

Salt was used to preserve meat and other foods. Salt perseveres by preventing decay. Disciples, if they stay true to their calling, make the earth a better place for all. But they can do so only if they preserve their distinctive character. If they lose their saltiness or distinctive character, then they become of no use to God.

Disinfectant

Salt has long been used as a cleaning agent. Infected body parts may be soaked in salt water for disinfecting. A sore throat may be helped by gargling with salt water. Jesus urged His followers to help clean up a godless world by living godly lives and setting an example for others.

Unit of exchange

Finally, in Biblical times, salt was considered a valuable commodity for trading in the marketplace. Some soldiers were paid in

salt because salt could be traded for almost anything. Jesus was telling his disciples that they were like salt because their distinct character was valuable to God's kingdom.

Amish Beliefs

What Christian beliefs and practices make us the salt of the earth? I thought about the Amish Community because they share our Christian faith.

"The Amish believe in one God eternally existing as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Romans 8:1-17). They believe that Jesus Christ, God's only Son, died on the cross for the sins of the world. They believe that the Holy Spirit convicts of sin, and empowers believers for service and holy living. They believe that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ, a free gift bestowed by God on those who repent and believe. We share all of these beliefs but do we go the extra mile?

One scripture often quoted in Amish worship services is: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2). They are admonished to live a life that is separate from the world." We are called to do the same.

Light

Now let us take a look at the word "light." The first thing that God creates is light. "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day" (Gen 1:1-5).

Everything else that God creates relies on the light of God. God's light gives life. God's light overcomes chaos. God's light shines in the dark corners of the world thus providing us with direction in our daily lives.

Our scriptures tell us that Jesus is the light of the world. Jesus asks his disciples to emulate him and be the light of the world. Jesus calls us to shine our light.

We hide our light by: being quiet when we should speak out, going along with the crowd, denying Christ, and ignoring the needs of others. What does it mean to shine your light?

Emanuel AME Massacre

On June 17, 2015, a young man named Dylan Roof entered Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, SC, the oldest African-American congregation in the American South. Roof joined parishioners as they were having Bible study. After approximately an hour of studying, Dylan stood up, pulled out a handgun, and began shooting the parishioners inside the church, killing nine people. Roof escaped but was soon captured.

Radical Hate

During Roof's trial, it was revealed that he was radicalized to hate African Americans by White Supremacist's literature. He felt he had to kill but later admitted that he thought about not shooting anyone since the members of the prayer group were so nice to him.

Emanuel AME Forgiveness

Listen to the testimony of the families who suffered unspeakable loss. "Although my grandfather and the other victims died at the hands of hate, this is proof, everyone's plea for your soul is proof they lived in love and their legacies will live in love," the grandson of 74-year-old Daniel Simmons said. "So, hate won't win."

"I forgive you, and my family forgives you," Anthony Thompson, the husband of 59-year-old Myra Thompson, said. "But we would like you take this opportunity to repent. Change your ways."

"You took something really precious from me. I will never talk to her again," the daughter of 70-year-old Ethel Lance, one of nine people killed in Wednesday's massacre, said. "But I forgive you and have mercy on your soul. You hurt me. You hurt a lot of people. But God forgives you. I forgive you."

"I wanted to hate you, God, I wanted to hate you, but my faith told me no," Bethane Middleton Brown, sister of victim DePayne Middleton Doctor, 49, said on Wednesday.

"For me, I am a work in progress," admitted a relative of 49-year-old Depayne Middleton Doctor. "I am very angry, [but] we are the family that love built. We have no room for hate, so I have to forgive."

UMC Bishop Statement

Bishop L. Jonathan Holston, resident bishop of the South Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church, issued this statement in response to the death sentence handed down to Dylann Roof, the man convicted of the Emanuel 9 massacre: A jury ruled Tuesday in the sentencing phase for the man convicted of the Emanuel (African Methodist Episcopal) Church shootings in Charleston. While the decision brings closure to the legal process, the need for healing is ongoing. The divisions in our nation run deep, and people of faith are called to break down the walls of hatred that divide us.

As followers of Christ—committed to social justice and opposed to gun violence and racism—we support discussion and cooperation centered on respect and justice for all. We must be God’s ***beacons of light*** in a dark world.

We continue to grieve lives lost, hearts broken, trust shattered. We continue to pray for the families of those killed, for the wounded, those who witnessed the violence, and for the whole congregation of Emanuel AME Church.

Let us not only pray for peace as the pathway to healing but act with justice—treasuring the Lord’s gracious love as we walk humbly in God’s company. Let us band together as people of faith to witness to the world the love of Jesus Christ.

Reporters Reaction

In a world at war and in a society, that often points fingers and blames others, this reaction was unheard of. Many reporters and interested followers of the story asked, “How could they forgive such a terrible, unprovoked act of violence against innocent lives?”

AME Beliefs

The AME Church closely follows the teachings of Jesus, who taught his followers to forgive one another, to place the needs of others before themselves, and to rest in the knowledge that God is still in control and can bring good out of any situation. Love and

compassion toward others is to be their life's theme. Vengeance and revenge is to be left to God. This is the Good News.

Good News

The Good News of this passage is that God loves us and calls us to follow the teachings and examples of Jesus. We are to be the salt and the light in a world filled with sin and darkness. What is our response to this good news?

Our Response

Our response to God's good news is to worship God and become disciples of Jesus. Being a disciple of Jesus is not easy. We are called to be the salt of the earth and to let our light shine. How do we do this?

Salt of the Earth

The world is filled with hate. When you show compassion to others you are the salt of the earth. The world is filled with judgment. When you forgive someone you are the salt of the earth. The world is filled with violence. When you are a peacemaker you are the salt of the earth. ***Jesus says, "You are the salt of the earth."***

Let Your Light Shine

When we do ministry with the poor through *Bethany Café* we are shining the light. When we do ministry with the homeless at the *Bethesda Center* we are shining the light. When we build houses

through *Habitat for Humanity* we are shining the light. When we repair houses at *ReCreation* or *ASP* we are shining the light. When we make cookies for *KAIROS* and visit the prisoners of Central Prison we are shining the light. ***Jesus says, "Let Your Light Shine."***

In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.

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