# A.M.D.G. 5th Sunday After Pentecost Text: Matthew 5: 13-20

 February 5, 2017

# Salt And Light

**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. **15**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. **16**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.

**17**“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. **18**For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+5%3A13-20&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-23253a)] not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. **19**Therefore, whoever breaks[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+5%3A13-20&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-23254b)] 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. **20**For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

“I am the Light of the World! You people come and follow me. If you follow and love, you’ll learn the mystery of, what you are meant to do and be.” This is the chorus to one of our favourite United Church hymns reminding us that Christ has brought life to our spirits and if we love and follow Jesus, the next step is to allow our lives to bring his light to the world. We are called to be the activity of God in the world and in this world on February 5, 2017, that is certainly a tall order.

I have spent the last three years at Vancouver School of Theology and with great joy and excitement, I can say the coast looks clear for graduation this May and when I look into my crystal ball, although it is somewhat cloudy at the moment, I do expect to be ordained in the United Church of Canada in June of 2018. As you may read in some of our VST literature, the mission statement of Vancouver School of Theology asserts “we are called to educate and form thoughtful, engaged and generous Christian leaders together with friends of other faith and cultural traditions. To this end, my education consists of a Masters Degree in Public and Pastoral Leadership and a Diploma in Indigenous and Inter-Religious Studies. I have learned many things during the course of my studies such as Christian and Jewish History in antiquity along with the relationhip between the Christians and the Jews in the time of the Reformation. And I am learning about the relationship between the Christians and the Jews today.

I have learned about Islam and the Muslim people who are a race of peace makers and peace lovers. I know that all of our hearts are heavy as we continue to hear the reports of the effects of the attack on a Mosque in Quebec City last week. A young man lost his way in the world and opened fire on a sanctuary filled with prayerful, worshipful people. We bow our heads in sorrow as we grapple with the reality of the hatred and divisiveness in the global community.

I have learned from members of the Indigenous citizens of our country and of the United States. I have listened carefully to the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation commission and I have wrestled with facing the dark truth about what our church and our government did to our Indigenous people, in particular, what was done to children.

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I am telling you this, not to give you a litany of my academic adventures, but in order to share with you the conclusion that I find at the end of my formal training: If we do not live out of the Gospel and the agency of love, we are hiding our light under a bushel and we are not adding any salt to enhance or preserve the flavour of Jesus’ command to us. He beseeched us to 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind' and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.’

In living the Gospel, we are called to live out our identity as salt and light. Salt can play a diversity of roles in our lives. Sometimes it heals. Other times it stings.

The other day, as I was leaving a restaurant on Davie Street after a flavourful bowl of lentil soup, my mind was wandering and my feet were operating without much guidance from my consciousness. I tripped and I fell and I scraped myself. Just a flesh wound. Nothing serious. But it caused me to think about the nature of salt. I have been putting aloe vera lotion and other healing elements on the wound, but what would have happened if I poured salt on it? It would not heal. It would sting. And maybe by stinging, it would remind me of the need to pay attention. The importance of noticing what is happening around me in the world. A sting caused by adding salt to a gash might sharpen our consciousness and mindfulness and open our eyes to the amount of suffering that is around us.

When we stand at the foot of the cross and look at Jesus’s wounds and deep pain-we feel the sting of his death but how is it that we also feel love? Gratitude. Trust. Holding the image of Jesus dying on the cross, knowing those who crucified Jesus placed vinagar on his lips as he hung in the burning sun; knowing he endured torture more painful than adding salt to his wounds, as gruesome as his death was, we learn from the risen Christ that God’s grace and love for us is stronger than death. Stronger than hatred. Stronger than suffering. Matthew knew that too and in his gospel he points us to the gift of everlasting life with God; to a life that moves past all pain.

And now, as we live as Christians in the 21st century, we rememeber Jesus’ suffering, but we also remember how he commanded us to love. He said, “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 God in heaven.”

Being a disciple in the world, following Jesus and joining the agency of love , is how we choose to live. But, there are times when we add salt to other people’s wounds. Never intentionally, of course. But all of us who are in relationships with our partners, our friends, our children, our parents, our co-workers..our bosses…from time to time, we trigger pain in others or inadvertently cause someone’s heart to lurch or to sting. When we do this, the task of healing is required. of kindness and forgiveness are required. If we live out of the Gospel and the agency of love, we can move from living with a salt that stings to a salt that adds flavour and preserves life.

There is much history behind salt in the Hebrew Bible. The earliest place we see it is in reference to the Jews who were forced into exile by the Assyrians in 722 B.C.E.  Those Jews were scattered throughout the vast Assyrian Empire. They never returned.  They were lost to history, and are remembered by Jews as being scattered throughout the world, living incognito (unknown, finally, even to themselves) in every culture and on every continent.

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Jewish faith understands these hidden Jews to have remembered (even without knowing it) the basic moral practices of Torah, and as such they are a preserving force in the world.  When Jesus addresses his audience as “the salt of the earth,” he is reminding them that Torah observance is not just a “religious thing,” not a set of odd Jewish practices involving seafood and pork and other foods that many non-Jews have no trouble with.  Torah observance is good for the world.  It makes communities gentler and more orderly.  It makes human beings kinder and more tolerant.

Jesus needs us is to be the salt that makes human beings kinder and more tolerant. And Jesus needs us to be the light that just might expose what we do not want to see. The salt that just might sting and the light that just might be blinding enough to reveal the truth about how we are to live in harmony as human beings.

In these times, in this day, I believe Jesus wants us to shine a light wherever we are in the world and let the world know, the current crew in Washington in particular, that the whole world is watching. Isaiah cries, “Shout out! Don’t hold back! Lift your voice like a trumpet!” Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?”

The prophet Isaiah speaks with a sense of urgency. He says if we speak out, if we speak up against what is wrong on this day, in our time, “Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly;”

As the currents of distress and disorder flow around us, may you be encouraged knowing you are filled with a powerful force that is stronger than hatred, stronger than death. You are the salt of the earth and may you always let your light shine, sent forth by God, into the lives of whoever you encounter. Let Isaiah’s words echo in your heart. “Shout out! Don’t hold back! Lift your voice like a trumpet!”….May it be so. Amen