

“Stand Up For What You Believe”

Genesis 18:20-33; Matthew 5:13-16
Sermon on the Mount Series

“When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight”
Jeremiah 15:16

Dr. Greg Anderson
October 1, 2017

Riverdale Baptist Church
Whitehorse, Yukon

Introduction

Jesus' declaration that those who follow him are **the salt of the earth** and **the light of the world** can be dramatized here at the Lord's Supper.

The salt of the earth refers to the preservation of life in the face of death and decay. At the Last Supper Jesus took the cup and said: . . . **for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.**

Certainly, a salt-like preservation of life in the face of death and decay.

The light of the world refers to the display of beauty and goodness. The Bible says: . . . **for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.**

And the Apostle Paul, referring to the Passover and most likely, the Lord's Supper, says: . . . **let us celebrate the festival**

Celebration is a light filled business.

Out from the celebration of the Lord's Supper comes a light meant to bring beauty, goodness and truth into the world.

So as we celebrate today, here in the privacy of the church sanctuary and the privacy of our own hearts, let us keep in the forefront of our minds that the 'salt and light' celebrated here has a greater purpose:

Our private celebration is for public celebration. Our private celebration is meant to inform and equip us for publically celebrating our Christian faith in the world given to us.

Text

It seems obvious that in our Lord's Sermon on the Mount his words; **you are the salt of the earth** . . . **you are the light of the world** serve as a kind of banner, or even Sermon Title.

The sermon begins with the Beatitudes.

The Beatitudes describe the company of those called to be 'with' Jesus, to live with Jesus, in the company of fellow followers, practicing life with their Lord as described in the words of the Sermon.

The Beatitudes are the outcome of Sermon on the Mount life.

The Beatitudes both benefit the disciples and the world.

While, as Pastor Michelle has pointed out, Beatitude is not Happiness, in that Happiness arising from its root of 'hap' or happenstance – which comes and goes on waves of emotions,

At the same time, the Beatitudes do bring into existence the true happiness that is the desire of every human being on the planet.

As Bryce shared, Beatitude life appears upside down, but it fulfills the Lord's Prayer: **Our Father in heaven . . . your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

So, Beatitude life, true happiness life, is the outcome of Sermon on the Mount life.

Jesus' sermon begins with Beatitude, which is the consequence of living with Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. But Beatitude is not simply for the enjoyment of the blessed, rather:

Beatitude produces: **You are the salt of the earth . . . you are the light of the world.**

It sounds audacious, almost unbelievable. Remember, Jesus is talking to a small handful of young Galilean peasants.

From what we know of the glory of the Roman Empire: the monuments of the city of Rome; the mechanisms of world government; the wealth of Roman Art; the power of the Roman Legions – it is ridiculous from the perspective of someone like Pilate, the Roman Governor, to see these few Galilean peasants as the **salt of the earth . . . the light of the world.**

And it is not much different for us today. The Christians in Yukon: the salt of the Yukon; the light of the Yukon – from many perspectives: ridiculous!

However, consider for a moment what is being said in our Genesis reading.

Archeologists have uncovered city ruins from the time of Abraham in the southern portion of the Dead Sea plateau. The ruins are covered with an ash layer resulting from a fire storm. The ruin most likely to be the ancient Sodom is a 9 to 10 acre plot surrounded by a 23ft thick wall. The archeological estimation is that 800 to 1200 people resided there.

As we heard in the reading the Lord was prepared to spare the city for the sake of 10 righteous people. Unfortunately, only one was found.

Do the math! Let's say a 1000 people in Sodom. 10 is 1 percent.

How many people live in the Yukon? Some 38,000. 380 righteous people preserve the place.

How many people are in your circle of influence: family and friends; co-workers; recreational and community partners? People whose names you know and whom you have conversations with?

Probably around 100. It only takes 1 to preserve the circle.

You are the salt of the earth . . . you are the light of the world!

At first glance it is audacious, from some perspectives ridiculous.

However, it is simple truth. **Salt of the earth.** Salt preserves that which is dead from decay.

A simple Sermon on the Mount word, a simple Sermon on the Mount act; and where spiritual death exists - decay is stayed. The rot otherwise produced by spiritual death is held back – it is a kind of salvation.

Light of the World. It is not enough to stay decay. The death of Christ itself is not enough.

What does the Bible say? **And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.**

Jesus said quite a bit about light. He made some outrageous claims about being the 'light of the world' (those healed sure believed!). In John's Gospel we hear:

The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.

The implication is that in the way of Jesus, the Sermon on the Mount way, the 'fruit' of life among the followers of Jesus blossoms into: **all that is good and right and true**

Application

However, as we all know, is it not always that simple. We know that from our personal experience; we know that from the history of the Christian Church.

We know the warnings of Jesus are all too often not heeded:

. . . but if the salt loses its saltiness . . . it is no longer good for anything . . .

. . . Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl . . .

The pastor Helmut Thielicke explained: 'Salt and light have one thing in common: they give and expend themselves – and thus are the opposite of any and every kind of self-centered religiosity. Salt loses its saltiness when it gets too mixed up with impurities, with foreign substances.

It is always a challenge to be the salt of the earth – to stay pure. It is a challenge to stand up for what we believe. The church father, Chrysostom, warned: 'for this is the very use of salt, to sting the corrupt, and make them smart.

It takes courage and wisdom to stand up for what we believe and to speak and act in a fitting manner, with love, to stay the decay.

It is always a challenge to be the light of the world. It is easier to condemn the world for its non-biblical practices than it is for us to be living examples of the beauty in the Sermon on the Mount.

In the Sermon Jesus will talk about sexual ethics and divorce. The Evangelical Church in North America is quick to talk about selected sexual ethic topics but in the statistics, seems to not be much different from secular society when it comes to divorce.

It takes courage and wisdom to stand up for what we believe and to speak and act in a fitting manner, with love, to display the light: the goodness and beauty of the way of Jesus.

As we celebrate Communion, may this dramatic action be our private commitment before the living Christ, to speak and act publically **as the salt of the earth and the light of the world.**
Amen.