

February 5, 2017

Salt and Light

PRAYER

Let the words of my mouth be mediations of our hearts and be always acceptable unto Thee. O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. AMEN

SERMON

If you were here last Sunday you remember that the Gospel reading was the beginning of the sermon on the Mount. It begins with the attitudes. In the Gospel, according to Matthew, the sermon on the Mount lasts for two full chapters. The reading from this morning is also part of the Sermon on the Mount. It is Jesus gathering the people together to begin instruction. To let them know where they stand if you will. And to let them know what God is doing and about to fulfill. And the attitudes he talks about being blessed. All the things that are part of that and are part of the righteousness of God.

He goes on in this reading to tell the people, remind the people, what they have been called to. What they are about. You are the salt of the Earth, you are the light of the world. These are things that they have heard before. They have heard it through the Old Testament readings, the Torah. And they have heard from the prophets. Isaiah calls the people of Israel the light to the nations.

They were given a purpose. They were given a task. They were given a responsibility as the chosen people of God. It was not that they were called to a special place out of the world to isolate themselves from the rest of the world. They were called to the special relationship with God so that they could then season the world, if you will. That's what it was to be the salt of the earth. To make it better. To take what they have received, the understanding of who God is and what God wants for his people. The living out of their lives.

What we see in the law that is given. What we see in the teachings that are given in the Torah. They have a task to live a life of righteousness not just so that they can be different from the world. But so, that the world can see and can be changed themselves. They will be drawn to God. That was their purpose as the chosen people of God. To show a way of living that is pleasing to God. Because they have been instructed by God.

They are called to be a light to the world to show what it is to live in a life of righteousness in relationship with God. And to invite the world to participate. To see and to understand and perhaps come and enjoy that same relationship with God. But if you read through the prophets especially you see that they had a tendency to fall away from following the law. Following what God has called them to do and to be. Their own humanity leads them to take for granted this position in the world. To not fulfill it by drawing others but by isolating themselves. Understanding themselves to be special in all the world for their own benefit. Where they

would be blessed and the rest of the world would be ignorant of who God is and what God has done in the world.

They allow themselves to slip. To become oppressors of others. To look only for their own advantage in the world, in commerce. So much of what the prophets declared to the people of God in the name of God. Is that they have turned away. The people can't understand that they fast, they try to encourage God to bless them again when things begin to not go well. Or when they hear the prophets proclaim that they have gone astray. That they are not following the heart of the law. The purpose of the law. Where all people might come to know God.

In the reading from Isaiah this morning, the people are perplexed. Why isn't God listening to us? We are God's people, God's chosen people out of all the world. And things are not looking good and we are calling for God to help us. But God seems to turn a deaf ear. Why is that? They don't look in to their own hearts. They don't look in to their own leadership. They don't look in to what they are doing as a people. Or they might understand. They are obeying God only when it suits them. Only when they think it will benefit them. Only when they are afraid that the rest of the world will collapse upon them.

And when Jesus is talking to the people, these are the same people that he's talking to. That have heard these words, have seen what it is to turn away from God and the consequences. And now a new voice has come on the scene, a voice of Jesus. And he is revealing himself to be the Messiah, the Christ, even the son of God. And so Jesus is preparing them to understand what is to come. What he is going to do with his life and the giving of his life. So, he reminds them you are the salt of the Earth. But if you lose that saltiness, that taste, then what is it good for? It's not good for anything. It's thrown out. It's trampled under.

That must have been a scary thing for these people to hear. Because they knew that he was talking about them. You are the light of the world but it's been covered up. No one does that. No one closes, no one can hide a city built on a hill. No one lights a candle and puts it under a basket. But that's what you've done. You have not gone out. You have not shown yourselves to be righteous people in all your dealings. In all that you do, with the people throughout the world. The people that have come to you. That travel here. You have taken advantage rather than bless them with the knowledge of who God is. You're not fulfilling your role as light to the world.

And yet he tells them, you know don't think that I've come to do away with everything. I haven't come to do away with the law. The law is good. The law shows you what God wants for you. To love God with all your heart and your soul and your mind and your strength. And to love your neighbor as yourself. A term neighbor that Jesus will redefine as he continues to teach the people. It's not just the chosen people but neighbors are everyone. They are all to be honored. And the dignity of their humanity maintained.

I haven't come to change the law. And I don't want you to try to teach people to change the law. This is all about fulfilling the law. This is what you will see as you continue to watch Jesus.

As he walks through the land, as he teaches the people, as he embraces the people. As he forgives those who have been brought to him caught in sinfulness. As he heals those who are broken and yet neglected.

He goes through his life doing all the things that the law has called upon the chosen people of God to do. And yet they have neglected. Because they were so much more concerned with their own lot in life. Or they were too fearful to reach out to others who seem strange who may be a threat, who may be after their resources. And living in fear they try to protect themselves rather than open themselves to the people. To change them rather than being changed through fear.

Now as Christians living 2000 years later. What does these words mean to us? Are we not called to be the salt of the world, the salt of the Earth? To season it, to change it by who we are by our relationship with Jesus Christ. Aren't we called to be a light to show where the darkness is? And to take it away. Are we not called to live without fear? To state boldly what God wants for all people. For that justice, for that mercy. To respect and honor the dignity of every human being. We are called not just to that special place, we have to make sure we don't fall into that same trap. Where we think that being a Christian, being called, becoming a part of the church is to call us out of the world. Is to call us to a special place where we can be protected. Where we can look out at the rest of the world and say, "You can't touch us." On the contrary we are called to be a part of that world and to change that world.

As we are changed, as we have come into that relationship with God and Christ where we have received the Holy Spirit. We are called to no longer be afraid of that darkness. Or what the world wants to do to its people. We are called to live without fear and to embrace one another. To fulfill that law even as Jesus fulfilled the law. By reaching out to those that had been cast out by society. To share with others what it is to live in that relationship with God. That cast out fear, that brings peace in an otherwise world of chaos. That's our role. That's our responsibility. That is our promise as we have come to God in Jesus Christ. As we have been baptized into this community called the church. As we have been given the Holy Spirit as part of our life. So, that it can direct us so that we can without fear address the injustices around us.

So we can embrace those that society is casting out because of ignorance or fear. We are called to embrace them. We are called to share with them new hope in the promise of God.

Jesus stood on that Mount and the people gathered. And you know his heart was filled with love and compassion. Knowing that he was bringing something to them that would take them a step farther. That when he was done with his earthly ministry, they would have opportunity to know and to embrace God in a new and special way. To know God's love for them without bounds. As he sacrificed himself for our sins. And he calls the people to remember what they have been called to. He calls us to remember our calling. To be salt to the Earth. To make it better. To be a light to the world. To dispel the darkness so that all might live in light. All might live in peace. All might live in hope.