

Isaiah 58:1-12

Psalm 112

1 Corinthians 2:1-16

Matthew 5:13-20

Be All You Can Be

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, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. **19**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. **20**For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

In his book *Led by the Carpenter*, D. James Kennedy writes:

"A man walked into a little mom-and-pop grocery store and asked, 'Do you sell salt?'

'Ha!' said Pop the proprietor. 'Do we sell salt? Just look!' And Pop showed the customer one entire wall stocked with nothing but salt. Morton salt, iodized salt, kosher salt, sea salt, rock salt, garlic salt, seasoning salt, Epsom salts, every kind imaginable.

'Wow!' said the customer.

'You think that's something?' said Pop with a wave of his hand. 'That's nothing! Come look.' Pop led the customer to a back room filled with shelves and bins and cartons and barrels and boxes of salt. 'Do we sell salt?' he said.

'Unbelievable!' said the customer.

'You think that's something?' said Pop. 'Come! I'll show you salt!' Pop led the customer down some steps into a huge basement, five times as large as the previous room, filled floor to ceiling, with every imaginable form and size and shape of salt, even huge ten-pound salt licks for the cow pasture.

'Incredible!' said the customer. 'You really do sell salt!'

'No!' said Pop. 'That's just the problem! We never sell salt! But that salt salesman? Hoo-boy! Does he sell salt!'"

Today's readings from Isaiah and Matthew illuminate the Epiphany theme of light shining in the darkness. We are called to be salt and light, to flavor and shine upon the earth with justice and righteousness. Isaiah vividly illustrates Jesus' warning that our righteousness must be more than just words and worship. Rather, we are called to live our worship, by acting as God's love and compassion for the world. So let us take some time today and contemplate these words for today - and see if we are stockpiling our salt, or have we more of this fine salt and light to offer the world?

I called my sermon, "Be all You Can Be" because it seems to me that the thrust of Jesus' words from the Sermon on the Mount was just this - live you life to the fullest - be all you can be - be proud - be confident - all of these things! And suddenly I realized I sounded like a commercial for the Marine Corp! I do believe that humans can reach their greatest potential without having to go into the military, but I do understand how helpful it has been to so many, and wish strength and peace for all of them.

But today I want to focus on Jesus' calling forth for his followers to embrace him - hear his message - and to be encouraged by him to be ever faithful in the newness of life - the joy of becoming truer to ourselves and to God each day of our lives.

Lets us look at the uses of Salt. It enhances taste - unless you have too much in there . . . but salt, in spite of potential health hazards when overused, is essential to health. I remember the huge salt licks from my Granddaddy's farm for the cows were vital to their survival, especially in the winter. It is also a preservative. Meat

was salted in order to help it last through the long winter months before we had refrigeration, supermarkets, and exportation of whatever we may want from wherever it can be grown regardless of if it is the "right" season or not!

So Jesus seems to be calling us be careful not to lose that special quality that his followers have of spicing things up a bit – be that quality that brings out the best in the rest of humanity, help preserve those who may be fragile – help them get through the difficult season of life when their resistance is down. And we are to do this, not because salt – we – just enhance life a little while we are doing it – but because we are essential to the fullness of life – the message that God send to this earth in his son. Be all you can be of flavor and preservative and essential life support to the world.

He also called us to be light. Light brings warmth, helps us to see more clearly, and can even supply energy through solar power. Our world revolves around light – the Sun is essential to life – and those who have noticed how difficult it can be to have energy and enthusiasm during the long winter nights, we can see how light can be equivalent with happiness. So Jesus seems to be calling us not be shy but to be confident in the good works that we have to share in his name – in the spirit of God! **"[L]et your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."** We are the lights of God – our beings - our doings - represent God on this earth.

Christ speaks with the authority of one who knows the Jewish law – and knows God. Many who have been following him have suspected that he want to splinter the faith – but he reiterates – he came to fulfill the law not to abolish it. So we must never forget the very close relationship Christians have with the Jews. The one who loves us the one we worship said, **"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."**

How do we deal with the fact that we do not follow the Torah and all its commandments and yet we still claim to follow Jesus, in light of these words? I believe that Jesus was speaking as one who wished to unite all of humanity together in love of God. He could not do that by denying his faith, his heritage, his path to knowing our father. Unity is vital to God, and Jesus saw his mission as enriching and fulfilling God's word.

Unity is vital to Disciples of Christ as well. I believe this is one aspect of our heritage that has shown our denomination to be way ahead of our time. There was an article in The Wall Street Journal on Friday the title of which was, "Where Have All the Presbyterians Gone? Nondenominational churches are the fastest growing in the country." By RUSSELL D. MOORE. In it he observes the various reasons that may have been causing the fall of what is called mainline denominations, but he also offers criticism of the new "buyer's market" mentality of church seekers.

I have felt for some time that our focus on Christian Unity and our unique "made in the USA" sort of brand name, should be appealing to all those people out there who have had enough of competition and are seeking a unifying, spiritual, community focused experience of growing together in faith. We are the closest thing to nondenominational that any denomination can be! We have no creeds but Christ – we are autonomous and yet we have a structure – a support system and connection with other churches – I just might be biased – but I believe we have a mighty denomination for which we can shine!

NIV, Mark 12:28-31 **One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."**

This is how we can fulfill all the commandments and still follow Jesus into this new faith tradition we have evolved into today – love God and one another and in that way we define grace for the world. AMEN