First Presbyterian Church of Soda Springs

February 5, 2023

Tasteless

Matthew 5:13-20 - The Message

**Salt and Light**

**13**“Let me tell you why you are here.” You’re here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You’ve lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage.

**14-16**“Here’s another way to put it,” You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don’t think I’m going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I’m putting you on a light stand. Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.

**Completing God’s Law**

**17-18**“Don’t suppose for a minute that I have come to demolish the Scriptures—either God’s Law or the Prophets. I’m not here to demolish but to complete. I am going to put it all together, pull it all together in a vast panorama. God’s Law is more real and lasting than the stars in the sky and the ground at your feet. Long after stars burn out and earth wears out, God’s Law will be alive and working. **19-20**“Trivialize even the smallest item in God’s Law and you will only have trivialized yourself. But take it seriously, show the way for others, and you will find honor in the kingdom. Unless you do far better than the Pharisees in the matters of right living, you won’t know the first thing about entering the kingdom.

Most preachers I know, look at verses 13-16 of this passage and simply focus on the part about being the light of the world. It makes sense, when you think about it, because the being a light to the world is a very important part of the task of bringing about the Kingdom of God. We’re called to let our light shine and not hide it from anyone. I can’t argue with that as this is vital to the work, we as followers of the risen Christ, are called to do.

Now, I’m not telling you anything you don’t already know. But, what about verse 13, and the warning that the writer of Matthew’s gospel includes about losing our saltiness?

Like most of us, I grew up reading the King James Version, and in King James, verse 13 is translated this way, *“Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.”* The New Revised Standard Version puts it this way, *“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 underfoot.”* And, one more, the Living Bible translate this verse this way: *“You are the world’s seasoning, to make it tolerable. If you lose your flavor, what will happen to the world? And you yourselves will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless.”*

Lately, as you all know, I’ve been exploring the Message translation of the Bible, and I’ve been introducing it into worship as a way of offering us a different take on God’s word. While it’s not a perfect translation, I would argue that the same holds true for any translation of Holy Scripture, currently in existence. Since I’ve always been fascinated by the differences in the various translations, I got to wondering just how many English translations of the Bible are out there. So, I did a little research. I was surprised to learn that currently, the number of printed English translations of the Bible is about 900. Let me say that again. There are approximately 900 printed English translations of our sacred text. This is simply the English number, and doesn’t include translations into non-English languages. Now what this number *does* include are partial translations, where someone may have chosen to focus on translating a particular passage or book, and also various paraphrases, all of which may or may not count in the grand scheme of things, but it’s still a really large number.

We all have our favorite translation of the Bible, and that’s really OK. Finding a version of the Bible that speaks to us; one where God’s word resonates with us, is vital to our growth as Christians.

So, what does a discussion about the various translations of the Bible have to do with losing our saltiness? Here’s how I see it. It can become really easy to get into a rut when it comes to reading scripture. Reading the same passage, the same way, from the same translation, over and over, can be very comforting and I’m certainly not opposed to looking to scripture for comfort and solace. But, for me, having heard this entire passage read from one particular translation for most of my life, the words began to lose their ability to motivate me. The words became rote and I lost any sense of awe and wonder that this passage is meant to illicit. They had become tasteless to me, and I lost the desire to actually put these words into action. For the longest time, my response to this passage was, “Yeah, yeah, I’m supposed to be the salt of the earth and light to the world, so what?”

It wasn’t until I became a Pastor that I started exploring other translations of the Bible. And, in doing so, I was able to gain new insight into what God is calling me to be and to do.

To me, the whole point of all of the different translations out there, is to make God’s word more accessible and easier to understand for everyone, not just for Bible geeks like me. I think there’s value to any translation, as long as that translation truly motivates us to do what God would have us to do. If the Word doesn’t resonate with us, how can we be the salt of the earth? And if we lose our saltiness; if we aren’t bringing out the God-flavors of this earth, how can we be a light to the world?

Now, shifting gears a bit, I’ll argue that it’s not just the rote reading of scripture which can cause us to lose our saltiness. There’s also a case to be made about how the liturgy itself can become pro forma. We come to church week after week following the same order of worship, singing the same familiar hymns, and doing everything in the same way that it’s always been done.

I do find a great deal of comfort in our liturgy, which literally means “the work of the people,” and I believe that many of you feel the same way. In a world that seems to be in constant flux, the familiarity of what we do here each week, provides a respite from the insanity outside our doors, and it provides us with an anchor to hold onto when the storms of life are raging around us. The fact is, the way we worship week after week, provides a connection to those saints who have gone before us, which stretches back hundreds of years. I’d hazard a guess that much of what we do, and experience each week in this sacred space, would be very familiar to those who founded this congregation 130 years ago.

And, on a purely practical note, using the same liturgy week over week, frees me up to focus on the primary task that Presbyterians assign to those of us called to be pastors, which is the preaching the Word.

But, there’s a risk here. When worship becomes dry and stale; when it becomes rote and when we come here just because that’s what we’re supposed to do, when being here on Sunday mornings has lost its saltiness for us, again, how can we be a light to the world?

This is where I’ll invite you to be part of the solution. If you find worship becoming dry and stale, come talk to me. Let’s take the best of our traditions and build on them. Let’s find fresh new ways to worship our God. I’m always open to hearing new ideas and trying new things.

Folks, my challenge to you, and to myself, is to find ways to remain salty. Continue to find ways to keep your faith fresh. If you find worship to be a chore, instead of a joy, let’s talk. Read your favorite Bible passage from a different translation, or two or three. I guarantee you that you’ll see things in a new and different way. Because, here’s the thing, it’s only when we remain salty that we can truly become a light to the world. AMEN