

Matthew 5:13-20

Taste and See

At this time of year one of the things that most of us look forward to is the incremental lengthening of the hours of daylight that we get. Emerging from the darkness of winter, as we experience it in this part of Canada, brings us hope for spring, new life in the vegetation and the awareness of the animals around us, as well as the appreciation that the icy waters will at some point start to move more freely.

It is that light that brings the hope. Light allows us to stop groping our way through the darkness.

One of the things our family enjoys doing is camping, however it can get pretty dark. There has been more than one occasion where the flashlight or the light from the phone has been enough to help me and others find their way back to the warmth and safety of the tent or trailer. Even a campfire in the darkness brings an assurance that there is light out there somewhere.

This is what is meant when in the scripture we are called light-bearers. Remember this is written in a time of no electricity. There would not be street lights everywhere or even a well-lit house. Sometimes all that was available would be a lamp with a wick and oil. It is into this kind of darkness that Jesus speaks about being light for others in their darkness. It is not that darkness is all bad. The only way you can see the moon and the stars is when it is dark. And maybe that is what we are like for others at times in their darkness. We are the flicker of light, the ones who bring hope, kindness, gentleness, and compassion to a situation. Maybe we are the ones who can see their light when they cannot. Or maybe we need someone to remind us of our light.

Most of us would be like those small lights of the moon or stars, a oil lamp or a flashlight. We are light when we are gentle with someone just starting out in their job. I think of the many new comers to Thunder Bay from outside of Canada, learning the language, the ways of this country, trying to handle the expectations, even in jobs as regular as serving you coffee at Timmy's.

We are light when we sit with someone who is grieving, grieving a loss through death, but also loss of health, a job, a dream. Not trying to make it all better but to just be present, few words needed, but just a presence. Making the cup of tea or weeding the garden, hanging out to fix a car, or a fence, or to just have a beer.

But to add to our individual lights, we are called as Christian community to be light in the world. Working together to bring hope to others. It is then that we are more like the light house on a hill that alerts people to danger and keeps them safe. It can be a sign that

safe harbour is not far off. It is how as a community of faith we respond to what is going on in community and in our world and do what we can to restore hope, relationship, and community. We are the ones through whom Jesus' light shines.

I spoke about camping, but another thing I enjoy are cooking shows or Instagram reels of people cooking. If you are like me, you may have particular cooks that you follow. For me it is a young man named Chef Dwight Smith. Now I caught on to him because he happens to be my daughter's brother-in-law. But I watch because his food looks good, and often I feel like I can actually make what he is cooking. Of course, he is adept at working with those who film him and for some reason I am always struck by his simplest act of putting salt on the food. He doesn't ever skip that step in the recipe. The camera angle, the intentionality of it gives it weight.

Now we heard the line about salt in the scripture reading. We often hear people say that someone is "salt of the earth", meaning regular, solid people. Yet I think that may diminish just how important salt was and is. Salt then and now preserves food so it maintains its quality. It also enhances the flavour of food, which is why it is such an important part of a recipe. There are few recipes that don't include a measure of salt or at least a dash of salt.

Try eating the most basic of food like pancakes and you will notice if the salt is missing. Now this analogy could go sideways pretty fast, as too much salt can also kill the enjoyment of food, but Jesus is talking about how as Christians we are to bring the flavour of God to the world, to give people a taste of God's kingdom, God's good government, God's love, compassion, grace, and forgiveness.

The one thing I want to point out, that may not be clear yet, is that we are not to become salt or light. We are salt and light. The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible says, "You are the salt of the earth" and "You are the light of the world." Or as The Message says it, "You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth...You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept." – Shine!

For the last few weeks, we have been in what the church calls the time of Epiphany. It is a time of light, learning what it means that Jesus is the light of the world. Hearing messages about how, in some way, we can be beacons of light for the world. We may not have used light language each time, but that was a theme presented in some way. This is not about becoming salt and light in order to get into heaven. It is about being who we already are, salt and light that brings the kingdom of God to earth.

And this may feel daunting, yet it happens in the smallest acts of kindness and generosity. As individuals this is doable. Give of yourself to another. Spend time in places or with people where hope is needed. It is not that you need to preach, though I would encourage you to not hide that it is your faith that encourages your work and worship. It is presence that makes a difference. Your loving kindness. Words are important though. If you hear someone drop words that are unkind or dehumanizing, if

you see someone struggling to keep it together because others are being judgemental or demeaning, please don't stay quiet. At the very least affirm the humanity in each person. If at all possible, try to keep people's dignity in tack. For each person is salt and light, they just may need to be reminded of their own worth as a child created in God's image.

We are how the world and the people in it get to experience the flavour of God and the light of God. Don't hide yourself. Stepping out in faith can be scary. Those of you who worship with me tend not to be ones to talk about the things of God in ways that are overtly God-talk, but we, as individuals and as community, are still the salt-flavour, the light bearers, the image bearers of God. If we keep that hidden, what we know about God's grace will also be hidden.

This week, may I encourage you to step out of your comfort zone a little. Be present to and for others. Don't hide your faith or that you attend church, pray, or read scripture. Be kind to those you don't know. If you hear a rude comment, take a breath and address it in kindness, with words that lift people up and grant them dignity. And don't forget to let others be salt and light to you.

Also, pray that God will continue to guide the work and worship of this congregation as we engage in being salt and light together in a world that is in deep need of those who do what is fair and just to the neighbor, being people who are compassionate and loyal in love. Take God and God's word seriously, however live with joy and hope in all you do knowing that God's got you and walks with you.

I speak to you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.