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Matthew 5:13-20

Reaching

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Matthew 5:13-20 The Inclusive Bible

“You are the salt of the earth. But what if salt were to lose its flavor? How could you restore it? It would be fit for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

“You are the light of the world. You don’t build a city on a hill, then try to hide it, do you? You don’t light a lamp, then put it under a bushel basket, do you? No, you set it on a stand where it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, your light must shine before others so that they may see your good acts and give praise to your Abba God in heaven.

There was a church that was built in the highest mountains of Switzerland. It was a beautiful church that had been built with great care by the villagers who lived nearby, but the church didn't have lights. You couldn't just go into the church and switch on the lights. Every Sunday evening the people who lived on the mountain side opposite the tiny church saw something magical happen. The church bell would ring and worshippers would wind their way up the mountainside towards the church. They would enter the church and then all of a sudden the church would light up brightly. The people had to bring light with them, so they brought lanterns. When they arrived at church they would light their lanterns and hang them around the church on pegs set in the walls, so the light would spread all around. If only a few people came to church the light would be very dim because there would only be a few lanterns. When lots of people came to church there would be plenty of light. After the service the villagers would take their lanterns home. To those who watched from a distance, it was as if a stream of light poured out of the church and over the mountainside. For many it was a sign that all was well. God's light was with them and in them.[[1]](#footnote-2)

"You are the salt of the earth…. You are the light of the world". We are made into salt and light for the world when we live by our faith. We are here today because the light of God has come into our life, what are we going to do with that light? Christianity is a wildly infectious disease. When you have a good case of it everyone around gets it too. The only problem is, so many people try to cure it by stifling it or ignoring it or hiding it. When someone is hurt and alone, or feeling offended or betrayed, or simply depressed, all you have to do is walk on by, as if nothing was happening that needed your attention. God wants us to be what God has made us to be. God wants us to speak about God's power and love, God wants us to witness by our deeds to God's grace and mercy.

Here are Greenland Hills we like to focus on sharing our light with others. We go in January to build homes in Juarez and our youth helped with those affected by the flooding in Wimberley. In November we will have our Global Village Market where all of the money is given to nonprofits around the world.

We have Sunday School teachers and folks who make meals for families with new babies. We have church workdays and folks who will come spread mulch on the preschool playground.

We have been talking these last few weeks about rooted, growing, reaching here at Greenland Hills. It seems like that is the way of our lives, when we are young we are rooted in the ones who love us and then we grow and then we reach out to the world. In our spiritual lives we are rooted in the inclusive love of God, then we grow in our faith through spiritual disciplines, and then we reach out in service and concern for the world and God’s people.

Mike Kilpatrick was on the Building Committee when Glory Be Hall was built and he wrote about rooted, growing, reaching. About reaching Mike wrote, “Our growth becomes our reach, our influence, and our canopy, providing ever-increasing shade, shelter and inclusiveness. Within that increasing canopy innumerable leaves are created, the objects through which light is absorbed and synthesized, allowing not only further reach but also life to the roots and branches. Reaching enables the entire system we call a tree to fulfill its promise.”

It makes me think of that great Michael Jackson song, “Man in the Mirror.” “If you wanna make the world a better place, take a look at yourself, and make a change.”

But change is hard. Jesus wants us to know that we have inside of us what it takes to change. “You are the salt of the earth… You are the light of the world.” Jesus acknowledges that it is hard to be salt and light because it is hard to stand out and make changes. There is a lot of pressure to stay the same. Yes, salt can lose its saltiness and a candle can be hidden under a bowl, but don’t let that be your story. Let your light shine!

We are all made in the image of God, the people that you are right now is who God made you to be, but we can live a life that is more full, more complete, more satisfying than what we have seen so far. Are we ready to become who God has always wanted us to be?

We can all name some things that we would like to change about ourselves. We can probably pretty quickly name ways we would like to live more fully, more completely, more authentically than we have so far. And those changes don’t mean that we would become a different person. It just means that we would become the person we always knew we could be.

I’m not sure what this change means for you. It could mean becoming more compassionate. It could mean repairing an important relationship in your life. It could mean addressing some big problems with your work-life balance or finding help for a bad habit, an addiction, or a mental illness you’ve been struggling with. It could mean making a commitment to explore your faith in a deeper way. For you it could be something entirely different than anything I’ve mentioned. The change you’ve been thinking about in your life may be something I know nothing about, that would never occur to me. And maybe you’re not even in a place where change is on your mind right now.

But for those of you who are in that place, who know there is a change you need to make and feel that you are ready, hear this: God knows that it will be difficult to get started. But do not fear. You are the salt of the earth; you are the light of the world, says Jesus. Let your light shine and give glory to God in heaven.

One day a man said to God, “God, I would like to know what Heaven and Hell are like.”

God showed the man two doors. Inside the first one, in the middle of the room, was a large round table with a large pot of stew. It smelled delicious and made the man’s mouth water, but the people sitting around the table were thin and sickly. They appeared to be famished. They were holding spoons with very long handles and each found it possible to reach into the pot of stew and take a spoonful, but because the handle was longer than their arms, they could not get the spoons back into their mouths.

The man shuddered at the sight of their misery and suffering. God said, “You have seen Hell.” Behind the second door, the room appeared exactly the same. There was the large round table with the large pot of wonderful stew that made the man’s mouth water. The people had the same long-handled spoons, but they were well nourished and plump, laughing and talking.

The man said, “I don’t understand.” God smiled. It is simple, he said, Love only requires one skill. These people learned early on to share and feed one another. While the greedy only think of themselves.[[2]](#footnote-3)

This past spring when we thanked the amazing teachers who have loved our children and youth in Sunday School class or Confirmation class or youth, Kristin Mallory, our Children and Youth Minister had the children give their teachers a clock part. Clock parts are very small and they do a little thing. Tick, tick, tick. They keep moving. They do their part. And when all the parts do their part and keep moving, time changes.

Take a moment to consider what God has done in us. We are the salt of the earth; we are the light of the world – because of God’s work in us. That is hard to get our head around. Has God made us into a light for others to see by? Has God made it that our lives light up other’s lives? I want us to take a few moments for us to ask God, “Am I Your light?” Don’t doubt, criticize or condemn yourself. Ask God and listen: “God am I a light? Please show me.” Ask, and then be quiet. Be still. Listen for God’s word for you today. If you sense God lighting you up inside, if you are hearing that you are a light, then thank God, and remember, that this is God’s work and it is good.[[3]](#footnote-4)

If you don’t feel that God is using you as a light, I am reminded of a time when John Wesley, the first Methodist, felt convinced of his unbelief. He wondered how he could preach to others when he had no faith himself. His friend Peter Bohler told him, “Preach faith till you have it; and then, because you have it, you will preach faith.[[4]](#footnote-5) When you don’t have faith, preach it until you do. Start small, and keep moving.

I love how The Message translation ends our scripture passage for today, “Be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God.” Thanks be to God, Amen.

1. <http://www.spirit-net.ca/sermons/a-or05se.php> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. <http://sermonstories.blogspot.com> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. http://www.spirit-net.ca/sermons/a-or05creativeclosings-se.php [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. http://www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley/journal.vi.ii.xi.html [↑](#footnote-ref-5)