

**Fifth Sunday of Epiphany/February 9, 2014**

**Isaiah 58:1-12; Matthew 5:13-20**

**Rev. Joel M. Krueger**

***"Seasoning"***

*"You are the salt of the earth!"* Jesus says to the crowds who have gathered to hear him. What is Jesus talking about here? When someone now says, "She/He is the salt of the earth" what they generally mean is that the person is a dependable, trustworthy, reliable, hardworking kind of person. Is that what Jesus was trying to say here? Was he trying to compliment those gathered around him there, trying to say to them, "You are the ones who do all the work around here, you are the ones who make this world go round!"

What does he mean when he says, *"You are the light of the world! A city set on a hill cannot be hid! Nor does anyone light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket! C'mon! They put it on a stand and let it light the whole house!"* What is Jesus getting at?

Context is important. And it is important for us to know who Jesus was speaking to. Here in Matthew's gospel, as in all the gospels, we know that he spoke primarily to the peasant class. There was no middle class. The vast majority of the people were the poor, working class. They were farmers, agricultural field workers, common day laborers, carpenters, bakers, maids and servants, those who did the vast majority of work in their world. Few owned any land. They were 90% of the population and were at the whim and will of the few who actually wielded any power. Landowners, government and religious elite, the wealthy, authorities who felt little charity or concern or compassion for those under them.

And that's important. Because I think it has everything to do with what Jesus is saying here in Matthew's 5th chapter.

When he taught the Beatitudes, like Moses bringing the 10 Commandments down the mountain, and said *"Blessed are the poor in spirit"* and *"Blessed are those who mourn,"* and *"Blessed are the meek,"* *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness"* and *"Blessed are the merciful,"* *"the pure in heart,"* *"the peacemakers"* and so on and so forth, he was calling out to those within his world who had no power, who had no hope, who had no dreams, whose lives were not their own.

And the more I read these words of Jesus, the more I am understanding them as not just some words to comfort them, not just words to try and give them some hope, or to ease their pain and to be the balm that allows them to go on, knowing that God loves them.

No. This is a clarion call! This word *"blessed"* that some understand to mean *happy*, or *favored*, or *sacred* or *divinely consecrated*, is here, more a word of *empowerment!* Jesus is really saying, you who know these things, you who have suffered, you who have borne the pain of the world, you who long, who ache, who yearn for a better, more just and righteous world, you are the ones who can tap into the power of God! You are the ones who are near to the kingdom of God. You are the ones who can truly transform this world because you know what it means to suffer and you know the things that bond you one to another. You know the real power that unites people and it is not the power of Caesar and Rome. It is not the power of the Herod's of this world. It is not the power of the wealthy elite and those who seek to dominate those underneath them.

And when he follows this up with "*You are the salt of the earth!*" what he is doing is telling them that if they want the world to change, then they're going to have to be the ones to do it! That's what I hear Jesus saying here. "*You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its flavor, how can it's saltiness be restored? It's no good for anything anymore.*"

**If you are going to be salt, which you are, *SEASON SOMETHING* for heaven's sake!**

His words here are meant to encourage, to empower, to remind them that God is wanting, is waiting to use them. He is telling them that God's kin-dom is right at hand, available for them to step right into, to take on and live it and bring it into existence right where they are.

Jesus' words are not that different than the words Isaiah was speaking to his people. Isaiah saw people going through the motions, following the status quo, faking it, not really living the way God wanted them to live. He complained that even their acts of religiosity, their fasts and their holy days did not change their hearts, did not have any effect on how they really lived.

Isaiah cries out for God, "*Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?*" Jesus' words were just as much a call to empowerment, to really be what God was calling them to be. Agents of transformation and change in their world.

This message is just as true and relevant for us today. God continues to call out to us. To all people. The world is a mess! The status quo isn't good enough! And those who seek to rule it with power over others and violence and intimidation and deceit and lies, they will continue to do so, unless . . . unless . . .

. . . unless the blessed, those who know and share the love of God, those who've known suffering, those who've known sadness and pain and hurt, who don't think of themselves as above others but as beside and with them, unless those who recognize we all have to depend upon and care for one another in this world, decide to start being the *seasoning* they are called to be!

God needs us to be salt! And we've got some seasoning to be doing! There's no point in us coming here each week and singing and praying and doing all we do here if we aren't going to be doing the work that will put some flavor into the world outside these doors.

We need to decide what kind of seasoning we're going to be, what kind of dishes we want to bring to the world. Maybe we can cook up some of God's *Love Lasagna*, some *Kindness Quiche* or some *Pesto Peace Pizza!*

We are the salt of the earth, but we need to make use of our saltiness. We are the light of the world, but we can't keep hiding our light. The day is come, the time is here. Together, let's be the agents of change and transformation God is calling us to be. Amen.