

**A Sermon Preached by Rev. Micah Nutter Dowling at  
Clarence Presbyterian Church on June 18, 2023**

**SALT AND LIGHT**

***13 Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.***

***14 Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.***

***15 Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.***

***16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.***

***17 Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.***

***18 For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.***

***19 Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.***

***20 For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.***

**Matthew 5: 13-20**

What's a good meal without seasoning? Or a dinner table without a candle or two? We have been called to understand our call to such tasks in greater society in the sermon of Jesus today. To be salt and light in a world often bent on stomping it out, to be salt and light instead of looking only inward, to be the salt and light that Christ has called us to be.

Will it be similar to lighting up a table of welcome?

Or savoring and protecting and preserving the way salt functions?

Why did Christ use these particular metaphors?

Or perhaps our central question from the text today is what is this righteous living the Lord has required?

Jesus often pointed to the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. If you have a younger family member critical of the religious, you can tell them they are not alone. Jesus was

often very much the same. Especially in the area of hypocrisy in religious practice. This is why we are challenged to exceed the Spiritual leaders of Jesus' day in way of righteousness, that our very participation in God's reign depends on it.

So perhaps it is the most important question to ponder from this famous section of a fairly famous sermon of Jesus: What is the righteousness we are called to?

I return you to the metaphor of salt to wonder along with me. We must not lose our savor the Scriptures read if we are to be functional as salt to the earth. Now upon reading chemists, salt itself by definition of its ingredients cannot lose its saltiness unless it loses part of its identity from contamination, making it no longer salt. Apart from contamination or isolation, salt must be definition be salty. In other words, salt is salty or it cannot be considered salt.

We must not lose our identity in Christ if we are to fulfill Matthew 5's call. Our identity from the foundations of the world, as beloved children of God made in God's own image. It is with this identity we lead from, we love ourselves from and have an opportunity to love others.

What contaminations could there be that work to erase our understanding of who we are? Could it be the contamination of comparisons? Or isolation as well? Convincing ourselves we don't need community and support, neglecting opportunities to be the church of radical welcome together.

We must remember our identity as children of God. As Presbyterians it is not an unintentional thing that we remember our baptism. This is connected to our call to be salt and light. We are identified in the waters of baptism as beloved children of God. This is the fresh beginning that begins everything else. Our very confessions and creeds rely on this.

We have been claimed and now we are salt to the world. As well as light. I think light is very important as a metaphor as well. We are to shine outward. Our text today challenges us to not be hid. We must let our love and our light be loud, to shine bright, because we elevate the light of Christ. Once we know our identity and claim that for ourselves, we shine that very truth outward in every corner of darkness, we let our light shine.

Don't forget our children's lesson today. Shining is contagious. Your light might coax another candle aflame.

Your turn to Sing: This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine....

I often have the opportunity to do this with Jenna and Kamilah at the church preschool where my wife pastors. Our shine can increase from other's shine. We need each other's lights. We are salt and light.

You know in the midst of the worst of the pandemic I had some real identity forgetfulness and needed a reminder. You see so much of that happened in-person for

me, the church gatherings around food, that feeling of a splash of water from the baptismal font, those hugs that felt like belonging. Seeing the light in the eyes of the faithful, gave me assurance of my own light. So, I needed a reminder in a very dark time.

The permanence of my purpose I longed to remember came by way of a tattoo. Once I could safely isolate and do so, I had a light bulb with a bit of an Edison look to it tattooed on my arm. The fragile nature of this source of light reminded me I couldn't do it alone. I must connect to a power source in community. Also, the Edison lesson is that I will fail and mess up a lot before finding my way to light sometimes. Of course, according to my more traditional mother I already messed up with the tattoo itself.

I hope folks might see it and simply say: Be the light.

Be the light to a broken world and create more light among those hiding as well. We are salt and light. We preserve the truth and protect the vulnerable, we illumine and reveal God's love seen in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ. That is our identity we can claim even on our worst day.

And the very turning outward is an important move for the church. It is an important move for all of us personally as well. Is this the living out of righteousness we are called to do? I think so.

Sometimes we can remember everything but the doing. We come to church, we claim our faith understanding, we recognize our place in Christ. We read the confession. But we forget that this involves our whole week. Better yet, our entire life. We are called to salt and light as our very identity. We are called to be light to all. This is righteous living on the move.

YOU are the light of the world. YOU are the salt of the earth it reads. We must resist spiritual laziness. We must resist the sin of hiding. Maybe there are gifts and talents remaining unused that the Lord has need of in your neighborhood or right here. Let yourself be stirred by this call. Show up and shine!

If you need an idea where to start, I would be happy to share a few mission projects with you. There is need for your light. As a community engager, I love to get good folks together and build lasting bonds in the city of Buffalo and beyond.

You are the salt and light of the world. Let it Shine.