

Sunday, February 16, 2020

Psalm 119 838 VU
I Corinthians 2:1-16
Matthew 5: 13-20

The New You: Being Salt and Light

“The New You” has been our theme for throughout this season of Epiphany. We have heard how to become a new you through spiritual, financial, emotional, and relational ways through Jesus’ teachings of love and care for others as well as ourselves. Today our focus is Jesus’ teaching which he shares in the Sermon on the mount and focuses on salt and light. Jesus states: “You are the salt of the earth” and “You are the light of the world”. If we passively reflect on these statements we might just say that these are good thoughts, but if we are to hear these words as a person living in Jesus’ era we might realize what He is saying is truly complementary as he lifts up those who are listening to have a special purpose.

You are the salt of the Earth. You are the light of the world. We must think about these two statements separately to truly gain insight as to what he meant. Why would Jesus call those listening to him the salt of the earth? If we reflect upon the use of salt in history and the role it played during Bible times salt was truly a valuable resource. Salt was the only means of preserving food and so necessary was it to the running of the household it was considered a commodity of trade. Where people acquired this life sustaining substance would be wherever the merchants had it made available for human consumption for the purpose of preserving food. If one had food to preserve, one also had wealth and also power. Salt was very important then and worth more than what we might realize today.

Throughout history, salt has led to the discovery and creation of major cities, canal systems, trade partners and even our language. The words salary, salad, soldier, sold all come from the root of salt and its trades. Communities in England ending in ‘wich’ indicated a salt mine was located there and with it trade was possible for goods being brought to the area. These communities were places of wealth and trade with Liverpool England became a trading city with salt as both the currency and commodity. In North America, early settlers also used salt as a means of preserving food as there was no refrigeration or ways to keep meat or other foods over the winter months. It is also used for healing- salt and warm water rinse if a sore spot exists in the mouth. It is essential for life and people actually fought over it.

During the American Civil War, on October 2, 1864 one of the worst battles was fought. 2800 Confederate soldiers squared off against 4500 Union soldiers. After one day of intense

fighting, shots continued throughout the night and muffled the sounds of crying and dying soldiers. What was the purpose of the battle? Strategic positioning? A great offensive to end the war? The reason the battle was fought was for a mineral so valuable that more wars have been fought over it than gold. The mineral fought for was salt near Saltville, VA which was the largest supplier of salt to the Confederate army. With the need for salt to preserve food and for general health, the battle proved to pave the way for a northern victory.

Salt is essential for life and we know that when we enter into hospital today one of the first things attached is a saline solution to help rehydrate the person. Yet not only do people need it, so do animals both domestic and wild to keep healthy. Salt is a necessary part of our diet but of course we have to watch how much we consume. For recent medical research tells us that too much salt in our systems will also harm us.

Jesus said You are the salt of the earth. He knew that salt was essential to life but it was difficult and expensive to obtain it. Salt was a means of killing germs and preventing sickness. But because it was very hot and everyone worked in manual labour, much salt was lost from the body in sweat so it was essential to replace it for health. So stating that the people were like salt- he was saying that they were a valuable necessity for preserving and enhancing a healthy, wholesome and abundant human life.

As he preached from the mountainside, Jesus also stated, "You are the light of the world." Then he gives an example of the purpose light. One lights a lamp but then puts it on a lampstand in order to give light to the whole house. As a city is on the hill, all can see it because it is up high but if there are no lights all is in darkness.

Light is all around us today. It is an automatic response when we walk into a dark room to flip on the switch. If you are driving at night, it is essential to have lights on to see. As you drive down roads like the 401 you can see communities and houses in the distance because of their lights shining in the sky. We also know that there are places which keep their lights on all the time and at night they seem to glow. This is something fairly new out in the county as there are more greenhouses and their lights continuously glow forming what is known as light pollution –too much light to see the sky above.

Jesus said, "You are the light of the world". And in John 8:12, Jesus is again speaking, and says "I am the light of the world". So how can this be? You and I and Jesus are the light of the world? In the teaching from the Mountainside, Jesus is lifting up the people in order that they would understand who they are and who they might become through him. Jesus says, "Let your

light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven,” He is encouraging his many listeners because it is through his teachings they have become His followers and by this reflect his light his teachings of life and love wherever they go. We must remember that when Jesus was preaching from the mountainside is was early in his ministry and he was striving to have them hear his words, and so he encourages them to do what they can as they begin to have hope again. As they have opportunity to think beyond 9one day that this person before them could be the One God had promised. With Jesus telling them you are the light of the world they have been given a purpose. They are to be like Jesus wherever they go so that those who do not know him, will see him in what they say and do.

When Jesus stated, “I am the light of the world,” he has just dismissed the woman who was caught in adultery and the crowd which had gathered to see what was to happen with her. She has been sent away and told not to sin again as no one dared to accuse her because they too have sinned. What might be called the darkness of sin was over all of them but Jesus then states, I am the light of the world. And there is no light besides Jesus. He is the source of light and life, he is the One through whom all have hope and with him, it’s light or darkness. It’s life or death. Choose this day with whom and where you shall walk.

Before electricity, people depended upon gas lamps, kerosene lanterns and candles. The lamp that Jeus referred to as being lit would have been an oil lamp and for those who were poor these lamps would only be lit for brief times. The people would depend on the sun’s light for their daytime activities and when the sun went down, it would be time for sleep. Yet with the coming of lights with different sources we can see with different levels of brightness, with soft lights, brighter lights and everything in between. But the one thing we cannot do is be the light in the world without Jesus. We need to reflect his light wherever we go. We need to understand the wonder of darkness and night sky and we are to understand who we might be if we focus on Jesus’ light to guide us.

The Himalayan salt light to me is a reminder of who we are to be in Jesus Christ- salt and light. Salt of the earth- essential for life, light of the world- reflecting Christ as the way in darkness and sin. The promoters of this lamp claim the light hea8ting the salt causes the salt crystals to release ions. These ions are to bind with air pollutants which fall to the ground so that the air is cleaner. And with cleaner air healing is made possible. I’m not totally convinced of this, but I do know that if we focus our lives on the One who calls us salt and to be reflecting his light, we are able to grow stronger in faith and in our relationship with Jesus Christ. And this is what the season after Epiphany calls us to do. Be open to receiving Jesus as the Light, the hope and

One who is known as Saviour and Lord. And the one who brings healing, and hope to many through faith and love.

You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. Seek God's kingdom and know that you are the faithful followers of Jesus Christ and that you are able to rejoice and praise his Holy name with shouts of joy, with loud Alleluias and thanksgiving. For you belong to Christ and anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone, a new life has begun. Let us give thanks and praise to God for we are a forgiven people. Thanks be to God. Amen.