



TOUCH POINT

God-Flavors and God-Colors – Touchpoint for February 1, 2023

Matthew 5:13-20 (The Message) ¹³“Let me tell you why you are here. You’re here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You’ve lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage.”

¹⁴⁻¹⁶ “Here’s another way to put it: You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don’t think I’m going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I’m putting you on a light stand. Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.”

¹⁷⁻¹⁸ “Don’t suppose for a minute that I have come to demolish the Scriptures—either God’s Law or the Prophets. I’m not here to demolish but to complete. I am going to put it all together, pull it all together in a vast panorama. God’s Law is more real and lasting than the stars in the sky and the ground at your feet. Long after stars burn out and earth wears out, God’s Law will be alive and working.”

¹⁹⁻²⁰ “Trivialize even the smallest item in God’s Law and you will only have trivialized yourself. But take it seriously, show the way for others, and you will find honor in the kingdom. Unless you do far better than the Pharisees in the matters of right living, you won’t know the first thing about entering the kingdom.”

Grace and peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

“You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.”

We have heard these words so many times. We have heard them spoken to us in many settings. But before we can begin to talk about what they mean for us, I think it is important to hear who they were first spoken to.

These words are a continuation of the Sermon on the Mount. They are the immediate verses following the Beatitudes. These words were first spoken to those who are poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who are hungry and thirst for righteousness because they don't have it. These are the meek, the merciful, the peacemakers and the persecuted.

Those who sit down on the hillside are described by Matthew as those who were cured by Jesus of various diseases and pains... demoniacs, epileptics and paralytics.

These are the salt of the earth. These are the light of the world.

Say what?!?

It is mind boggling enough to say that these people are blessed. I mean, maybe I can understand Jesus wanted to make them feel good and give them a little pick-me-up.

But to say that THESE people are the salt of the earth, and THESE people are the light of the world... I mean come on, these people have nothing in and of themselves to offer.

And yet, Jesus is now not only saying they are blessed... He now is saying they are going to be a blessing.

Blessed to be a blessing. Where have we heard that before?

I am struck that at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, as he begins his journey, we hear the very same word that we hear at the beginning of the story of the people of Israel.

Abraham and Sarah – a couple of wandering nomads, childless and barren, with no hope for a future – become the foundation of hope for a world in chaos. Abraham and Sarah are blessed to be a blessing.

Jesus, beginning his ministry, attracts the sick in the flesh and spirit and says, *“You will be my light and flavor in the world.”*

They are those who have nothing to give... nothing to claim for themselves, nothing to show for themselves.

Which brings up a couple of points to make about salt and light. Neither salt nor light exist for themselves. I don't know anyone who, after eating a meal, says, “That was really delicious salt. I really liked the salt in that meal.” And the same can be said for light. One looks and sees beauty in what light shines on – trees, mountains, people, animals, paintings. And in one respect, one does not see the light but instead what the light shows.

Is there something here for the church to learn?

Have we spent too much time trying to be a salt-lick rather than the salt of the earth? Trying to get people to come and be a part of us, rather than going out and enhancing the world in which we live? Rather than bringing out the God-flavors of the world?

Have we tried to get people to look at us and to us rather than shining on the beauty, the God-colors that are out there in the world?

Just something to think about...

Now back to the people in our passage. The poor in spirit, the meek, the hungering. These are the salt of the earth. These are the light of the world.

Not salt TO the earth. Not light TO the world.

But salt OF the earth. And light OF the world.

Their gift to the world comes out of their experience of the world. They are the flavoring of the world because they have been flavored by the world.

Their pain, their poverty, their hungering and thirsting have so flavored their existence that they are now able to touch others in their pain and poverty and hungering and thirsting. And shed a light into others' darkness.

Their poverty of spirit, their pain and hungering, their meekness are no longer the condition of a hopeless humanity, but the soil from which God's life-giving action will grow. Their stains are the window through which God's light will shine.

I remember a time a few years back, a fellow co-worker who I knew a little, came up to me and asked if he could take me to lunch.

“Sure,” I said, “but if you don't mind, may I ask why?”

“Yeah,” he said, “I want to talk to you about life. My kids are getting older, my wife and I are having all kinds of conversations, and I want to hear about your experiences.”

I just kind of gave him this deer-in-the-headlights look and said, “You *do* know who you are talking to, don't you? You do know I am divorced. You do know I have two teenage boys who are pushing me over the edge. You do know that about me, don't you? Why in the world would you talk to me?”

And he just looked at me and said, “EXACTLY, who else would I talk to about the struggles of parenthood and this stage of life?”

I just kind of shook my head and smiled silently... and then I looked up at him and screamed, “Someone who has their act together you idiot!!! Good God man, find someone who has a clue! Don't be stupid.”

We had a nice lunch... and quite a few more after, as I recall. And he never really asked for my advice on anything. He just wanted to know the experiences and feelings of my journey.

You are the salt OF the earth. You are the light OF the world.

Your gift to the world comes out of your experience of the world.

You are the flavoring of the world because you have been flavored by the world.

Your pain, your poverty, your hungering and thirsting have so flavored your existence that you are now able to touch others in their pain and poverty and hungering and thirsting... and shed a light into others' darkness.

Your poverty of spirit, your pain and hungering, your meekness are no longer the condition of a hopeless humanity, but the soil from which God's life-giving action will grow. Your stains are the window through which God's light will shine.

Perhaps this is our righteousness that Jesus talks about that must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees.

We are made from the stuff of this earth, and like Abraham and Sarah, we wander aimlessly at times.

We are made from the stuff of the earth, and like Jacob, we walk with a limp as we wrestle with life and God.

We are made from the stuff of the earth, and so our righteousness, our rightness, is simply being that which we were made to be – human beings in all our frailties and flaws, hungering and thirsting, meekness and mourning.

And in that, we are salt and light.

I want to close with the story of two great theologians. One you may have heard of, one probably not.

The first one is Suzy. Suzy was six years old when a friend of hers invited her to church. She had never been before, and when she sat down in the pew she looked around and saw the stained-glass windows. She didn't know who all the people depicted in the windows were, so she asked her friend. "Oh," her friend said, "Those are the saints."

After worship she and her friend went to Sunday School, and there in class, the teacher asked if anyone knew who the saints were. Suzy excitedly raised her hand, and when the teacher called on her she answered, "They're the ones the light shines through."

The second great theologian I want to quote is the singer-songwriter Leonard Cohen, who wrote the hauntingly beautiful lyrics:

Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in.

You are the salt OF the earth. You are the light OF the world.

And if you don't feel up to it, if you have doubts and questions and feel poor in spirit, well guess what? Blessed are you... the poor in spirit... and we are back at the beginning... where we are blessed to be a blessing.

Your gift to the world comes out of your experience of the world.

You are the flavoring of the world because you have been flavored by the world.

Your pain, your poverty, your hungering and thirsting have so flavored your existence that you are now able to touch others in their pain and poverty and hungering and thirsting. And shed a light into others' darkness.

Your poverty of spirit, your pain and hungering, your meekness are no longer the condition of a hopeless humanity, but the soil from which God's life-giving action will grow. Your stains make the stained-glass windows through which God's light will shine.

You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taize Choir, Remember Me)

Be Still, know that I am God

Lamb of God

(Salt of the Sound)

Lamb of God, have mercy on us.

Lamb of God (hear our prayer),

Lamb of God, Grant us peace (hear us pray).

This we pray.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Come O Lord and Set Us Free

(John L. Bell, The Wild Goose Collection)

Come, O Lord and set us free. Give/Bring your people peace.

Come, O Lord and set us free. Come Lord Jesus, Come.

1. And take our guilt away. Give us your pardon Lord.
2. Free from our self-obsession. Free from each fond possession.
3. Free to affirm each other...as sister and as brother

Reshape the world you made. Let what your hand created...be always celebrated.

The Meal

Lord's Prayer

(The Scottish Festival Singers)

Benediction

May God Keep and Bless You

(Marty Haugen)

May God keep and bless you, and nothing distress you.

May God guard and guide you and friends walk beside you.

May God's arms surround you and fear not confound you.

May God's light shine through you and night not subdue you.

As you sleep and wake may your prayers arise as love songs for God,

Whose love never dies, whose love never dies.