

“Being Salt and Light: It’s Not What You Think”

A sermon by Pastor Steve Easterday-McPadden
for First UMC, Grand Junction, Sunday, Oct. 25, 2020

This sermon can be listened to on the FUMCGJ
website: www.fumcgj.org/sermons-2/

Scripture Text:

- Matthew 5:13-15 [NLT]
- Other key source:
Jim Wallis, *Christ in Crisis? Why We Need to Reclaim Jesus* (New York: HarperCollins/Harper One, 2019)

OPENING

- This is the last sermon in this series on *Jesus’ FAQ’s on the Kingdom of Heaven*, and I have mixed feelings about that. On one level, I am kind of bummed and on another, I am energized.
 1. One of the “energizers”, if you will, is that in a season of “**either / or**”, this is a “**both / and**” sermon. As the sermon title suggests, it’s probably not what you think. You’ll understand what I mean in just a little bit.
 2. Another “energizer” has to do with the guidance the themes in this series offer to our vision for ministry here at FUMC Grand Junction.
Like the “Marks of Discipleship” I shared with you last week that help give us a roadmap, if you will, for what that important concept

entails, I look to *Jesus’ FAQ’s* to help focus us on what kind of Church we ought be striving to be as we navigate through and past the coronavirus pandemic which has wreaked havoc on us for going on a year now.

Trusting fully in Paul’s assertion in Romans 8:28 (*quote this...*), I believe the opportunity to ask what kind of church we ought to be is a serendipitous benefit of COVID. And I think the center piece of our response is a vision of what the Kingdom of God looks like from Jesus’ perspective.

3. I am also excited about this because it seems some of the metaphors I’ve used have stuck with many of you! I got such a kick out of one of the gifts left for me at Church this past week:

“Desktop Tetherball”
game



So, let’s get to the heart of the matter: What do I mean by this being a “**both / and**” sermon and not an “**either / or**”? As always, the Scriptures frame the discussion.

TO THE SCRIPTURES

¹³ “You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless.

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house.”
– Matt. 5:13-15 [NLT]

(*Unpack in light of our *Sitz im Leben**)

- Salt, not just a “flavoring” (NLT and other translations), but a preservative (“saltiness” NIV).

In other words, salt serves a conservative purpose in our lives, and that is a good thing.

(*Briefly expand on how those who have conservative perspectives act to preserve what is of value in our society – and Jesus’ endorsement of this!*)

I’m going to repeat what I said a few minutes ago: Salt is a preservative and serves a conservative purpose in our lives, and that is a good thing.

- So what about “light”?
Light is that which drives out darkness, providing a better, safer place for all to live. (“No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a

basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house.”)

(*Briefly expand on how those who have progressive perspectives act to shed light on things that need to change – and Jesus’ endorsement of this!*)

In other words, light is a reforming agent, serving a progressive purpose in our lives. It illuminates dark places, allowing us to see where we have gone astray and helping to put us back on the right path. And that, too, is a good thing and something Jesus endorsed!

But, what if there’s too much light? That is, what if the light on our path becomes a floodlight shining in our faces? Too much light can be blinding and can end up damaging our eyes, so that we can never see clearly again. That which was meant to illuminate a path out of the darkness can end up paralyzing us and keeping us from making any forward progress at all.

And what happens if there’s too much salt? What happens if the salt concentration is not balanced out by other elements? Salt in too high a concentration doesn’t preserve things of value, it corrodes and destroys them.

SERMON THOUGHTS

- (*The extremes vs. the *via media*.*) I would suggest that the extremes have turned healthy political and theological conversation into a

shouting match where the salt concentration threatens to destroy that which it is supposed to preserve and where the intensity of the light in our faces threatens to reduce the zeal of the reformer into little more than flailing and groping for a way – any way – out of the darkness.

- But, we have to be careful in this metaphorical discussion of conservative and progressive philosophies not to confuse them with the political parties they're often associated with. I think that serious-minded conservatives and progressives are much more nuanced and balanced in their perspectives than the party machinery often reflects.
- The truth of the matter is that we need each other, of differing, balanced perspectives in order to live into the Kingdom of Heaven the way Jesus promoted it.

We need conservative perspectives that help us not to throw the baby out with the bathwater of change and progress. There is much in our society that should be preserved, held onto, allowed to grow and bear fruit.

And we need the light of the progressives to help us see where we're stuck in places of brokenness, fearful of what change might mean. There is much in our society that no longer works for the health and wellbeing of everyone. Too many have too little opportunity and, therefore, too little hope.

Without the gracious participation of all in society, we will never achieve what Jesus envisioned and taught concerning the Kingdom of Heaven.

CONCLUSION

I want to conclude this series with a word about hope and action.

Hebrews 11:1 says, “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Jim Wallis paraphrases this by saying, “Hope means believing in spite of the evidence, and then watching the evidence change.” [Wallis, 262]

And the evidence changes when we get involved and live our faith in courageous ways that are aligned with the values expressed in *Jesus' FAQ's on the Kingdom of Heaven*. How we answer the question, “Who do YOU say that I am?” And how we answer each of the other questions we've considered in this series:

- ✓ The Neighbor Question
- ✓ The Image Question
- ✓ The Truth Question
- ✓ The Power Question
- ✓ The Fear Question
- ✓ The Caesar Question
- ✓ The Peacemaker Question and
- ✓ The Discipleship Question

Each of these names a value in the Kingdom of Heaven the way Jesus speaks of it. The harder questions are –

- Do we want what He wants for us?
- Are we courageous enough to speak truth to

power in love, the way Jesus did?

- And are we humble enough to acknowledge that we need salt *and* light in balance in order to achieve the best of human community?

God's tent, under which we live and labor, is more expansive and inclusive than we are given to believing. Whether you are salt or light, you are welcome here, accepted and loved. We *need* each other's points of view – the conservative *and* the progressive in balance – in order **to act** on the problems of our time with faith and hope and then stand back and watch the evidence of a broken world change!

“Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done...” Amen.