

Nourishment for the Journey

Ruminations on Matthew 5.13-20

This passage immediately follows and builds on the Beatitudes, Jesus' vision for a transformed world following the virtues and values of God (i.e., the kingdom of heaven), and overturning the values of human empires. With that vision in place, Jesus speaks these words to his followers about how following the ideals of the Beatitudes will require us to be the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world."

Notice that he tells us that **we** are this salt and light. He doesn't claim that it is only him. And this is precisely how the church (and the gospel of John) has gone astray for two millennia in claiming that Jesus is the light when it clearly states that he said that we all are the light. By making Christianity a faith about Jesus rather than us as the followers of Jesus, the church has undermined and sabotaged Jesus' own message by relieving us of responsibilities that Jesus himself placed on us. A church that tries to make it easier to be a Christian by only having us to believe the right things about Jesus, instead of living by the ways of Jesus, is itself living in opposition to what Jesus himself taught us.

In this most famous of Jesus' sermons, the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus repeatedly (in chapters 5-7 of Matthew's gospel) points out how we are to behave, not how we are to believe. We who are living today need to take back Jesus' own values, and reject those that have falsely been affirmed as though they were his teachings. We need to be the salt that adds Jesus' own spice to our lives, and the light that shines amidst the false teachings about Jesus and his Way.

How quickly some of Jesus' followers lost their savor in making their own lives easier by creating a belief-based religion about Jesus the person instead of an active, deed-oriented faith based on the virtues and values of God which Jesus was teaching and enacting. Within a matter of decades, the synoptic gospel pronouncements of "follow me" (i.e., follow the values I represent) were converted into a less rigorous demand of simply "believe in me" as recorded in the Gospel of John.

What irony that Jesus himself warned about this unsavoriness that keeps us from being the salt of the earth and the light to the world. What tragedy that so many today believe it is more pious to pretend we cannot be the salt and light Jesus said we could be, and to claim that only he himself could be that salt and light.

And so we, the followers of Christ, need to take seriously our role to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world as he told us we are to be. We are to be brave in contradicting the authorities who have perverted Jesus' teachings for their own ends; and also the myriad followers of these false prophets who are more enamored by theologies of cheap grace than costly discipleship.

Where is our saltiness? Are we willing to spice things up in speaking the truth to power and practicing genuine righteousness rather than being complicit with comfortable platitudes and seeking only the security of believing we are saved without having to actually behave any differently?

Are we brave enough to be light to a world that doesn't want the truth shown on them; who'd rather live a convenient lie than live a convicting truth? Are we willing to put our light on a hill for all to see when there are others telling us we should put our light under a bushel basket or keep it to ourselves? Do we listen to Christ or to our culture? In which way do we best honor our Creator – making our lives easy, or making them virtuous?

— Rev. Bret S. Myers, 2/1/2023