

A Meditation for Feb 5/23, ‘the Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany’ – pg. 1

By the Rev. Warren Ball of Mt. Albert United Church

Hello and welcome to this meditation as we celebrate the Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany! In this season of light, today Jesus makes that theme explicit as he calls us to be salt of the earth and light of the world. Well, let’s begin today’s spiritual journey by turning to God in prayer:

Holy God, our Source and Hope:

**you are the light of our knowing
and the rhythm of our feeling.**

Help us, therefore, to trust that we may understand;

help us, therefore, to understand that we may love!

In Jesus’ name this we pray, amen.

Today’s Scripture reading: Matthew 5:13-20 ‘You are the salt of the earth’ (NRSV)

Jesus once said, “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled underfoot.

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lamp stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to God in heaven.

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Sermon: ‘Salt and Light’

Shine the light of your love in our midst now, O Light of the world; season our understanding with your grace, O Salt of the Earth! Bless us as we turn to you now, amen.

If we’re called to be salt and light, well, what the heck does that mean? Well, to begin, I think that it means that we appreciate virtually everything about life. You see, when we choose to be salt and light, we simply don’t have the time, or the energy, to waste in complaining, or wishing things were different, or feeling that there’s nothing that we can do about our lot in life. No, life is so appealing, and we have so much fun living it, that

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we’re simply too busy to waste a single moment in those futile efforts! Of course, we do prefer some things to others. And, surely, there are distasteful elements in our lives. But as people of salt and light, we NEVER let the negatives overwhelm the positives. As Jesus says today, “A city built on a hill cannot be hid!”

What’s more, we refuse – we REFUSE! – to live with guilt. We neither hang on to bad things from the past, nor worry about things that have yet to happen. Certainly, we’ve made our fair share of mistakes. But we don’t waste time dwelling on them, other than to learn from them. Bad things do happen – oh, don’t they happen all the time? – but as salt and light, we don’t let those bad things define who we are or, at least, can become.

Now then, it’s not as though we’re always calm and relaxed. Every day isn’t always the same. No, but as people of salt and light, we don’t live in our memories of the past, nor do we live in our hopes for the future. Here and now is where we prefer to be because what we do in the here and now is the only thing that we can change. As Jesus once said, “No one after lighting a lamp puts it under a bushel basket, but on the lamp stand, and it gives light to all the house.”

And, if we refuse to live with guilt, we also refuse to create guilt for others. We don’t say things like, ‘Why did you do that?’ Or, ‘I’ll bet you wished you had done this!’ You see, as people of salt and light, we know that we’ll never feel bigger by making someone else feel small. And, even though guilt is one of the most commonly experienced negatives in life, we recognize it for what it is, and we refuse to let its self-defeating nature influence what we do, and what we say.

As people of salt and light, we love others but, at the same time, we always recognize that we are not the same as others. You see, although we cherish our relationships, we know that others are never in control of who we are, or who we can become. Nor are we dependent on others for our own sense of self-worth. We are not dependent, we are interdependent, because interdependence is where our relationships feed us even as our friendship feeds others. But no one relationship can ever really limit us, for we know that the need to feel approved is one of life’s most dangerous motives. Jesus once said, whoever follows God’s commandments, and teaches them, will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

But, if we’re not known for seeking approval, then we are known for joy. You see, because we seldom feel threatened, most of what WE see is joy.

Now, imagine that the mirror of life is right there in front of you. Does the image you’re looking at resemble what I’ve been talking about? Well, guess what? The answer doesn’t really matter – it doesn’t at all! What matters this morning is not our current image in the mirror of life, but whether we believe that that image can be changed. Sure, where

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we’ve been, and what’s happened to us, plays a huge role in who we now are. But listen up: who we now are is also tied into who we want to become.

And, so, to the story of ‘Everyone.’ Just as happens with you and I, ‘Everyone’ felt bombarded with confusion, worry, and circumstances. Sometimes they felt that the who-they-were had become the very same as what-was-happening. But then ‘Everyone’ heard some amazing news. Who-we-are is never the same as what-is-happening. Now that’s simple, but it’s not simplistic. It’s simple, because it puts us directly in touch with the very Source of life. But it’s not simplistic, because ‘Everyone’ has to find a way to control the constant, subtle influence of their own egos. Who we are is not the same as what’s happening. That’s simple, but it’s not simplistic. It’s simple, because now ‘Everyone’ has access to God’s own hope and purpose. But it’s not simplistic, because God’s values often cut across the grain of living in a material world of power and control. Who we are is not the same as what’s happening. That’s simple, but it’s not simplistic. It’s simple, because ‘Everyone’ can feed their spirits with good, nutritious spiritual food. But it’s not simplistic, because that kind of feeding takes time and effort. It means that ‘Everyone’ has to act as though they’re salt and light before they’ll get to feel that way!

Today, you and I are called to be salt and light, too! Well, what do you think – can we do that? You bet your life we can! After all, ‘Everyone’ did! Amen? Oh, yes; amen!

Come, let us turn back to God now in prayer; come, let us pray:

Gracious God, we thank you for the light that shone in Jesus all those years ago. We thank you for the light that shines yet in his teaching and the light that ‘Everyone’ can know in your grace! Shine that same light now into the darkness of our self-doubt. Illuminate the path that you would have us walk. And help us to feel you one-with-us as we walk.

And then, O Joy Eternal, season our living with the salt of your grace that, as we live your love for the world, your joy may enter life more fully. As we look, perhaps with regret, to where we’ve been, let us see all the ways that you have carried us. And as we look to the great unknown of the future, let us see the glorious end-game of your love. Let us do that, O God, that, as we live these present moments, we may do so as your salt for the earth and your light for the world.

We pray now for all who are facing difficulty this day and we pray, too, for all the places where there’s difficulty. We especially pray once again for the people of Ukraine, that peace come and that justice may be brought to bear! And, from within our church family, O God, we continue to pray for Dave Kelly, as he goes through sets of chemo and

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radiation for throat cancer. May he, together with Sharon, Dawn, and the family, feel your protective and enabling presence with them.

In the silence of the next moments, O God, receive the deep burdens that our spirits bear today: *moment of silence*. All that I have named with my words, all that lies yet too deep for words to touch, we bring to you, God, as we take those words that Jesus once taught us and pray together the contemporary choral version of Christ’s Prayer at VU959:

Our Father, in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial

and deliver us from evil,

for the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever.

Loving God, enable us now to be your salt for the earth and light for the world! In the grace of your love, the redeeming hope of your Word, and with the ongoing strength of your company, amen!