

Living the Faith

Second in a Series of Four: Faith Cometh By Hearing

February 16, 2020

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Matthew 5: Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?” You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a 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 your Father who is in heaven.

Dear friends in Christ,

A Sunday School Superintendent named Dan tells a story of a girl named Sarah who came to Sunday School one day against her will. When Dan told Sarah that he was glad she had come to their Sunday School, she responded by kicking him hard in the shins. He responded by being kind to her and teaching her about the love of Jesus for her. The next Sunday he greeted her with a friendly spirit, and she responded by kicking him hard in the shins, not once but twice. Dan had his doubts whether this would ever work well, but he determined to keep on being kind and inviting her to know the love of Jesus for her.

A few Sundays later, she sat next to him in church, she actually put her head on his shoulder, then looked up at him, and said, Mr. Dailey, I hate you! He said, “I know, I know.” He thought to himself, “Well this is better than getting kicked in the shins.” He kept on being kind and teaching her the love of Jesus.

As time went on, and as Sarah kept on coming to Sunday School, the love of Jesus Christ in that Sunday School won the day, and Mr. Dailey and Sarah became best of friends. Praise be to God Mr. Dailey lived his faith in such a way that Sarah eventually saw his good works, she tasted the love of Jesus Christ, she was attracted to that church as a place of refuge, she came to believe in Jesus as her Savior, and as an added bonus for the Sunday School Superintendent, no more getting kicked in the shins!

Last week, we began a four part series on the subject of Christian faith, and we focused on the blessedness of faith, next Sunday, which is Transfiguration Sunday, we’ll focus on Mountaintop faith. Today, our sermon theme is Living the Faith. We explore what our life together looks and feels like when we live our faith in such a way that other people see our good works, they taste the love of Jesus Christ, they are attracted to this church as a place of refuge and good news, there is less and less getting kicked in the shins, and our Father in heaven gets the credit.

Two truths we would be learning today about living the Christian faith at home, at the work place, and out in society. Truth #1 is that Christ is counting on Christians to be the salt of the earth, not honey. Truth #2 is that Christ is counting on Christians to be the light of the world, not shades of gray.

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Truth #1 is that Christ is counting on us to be salt out in society, not honey.

When Jesus declares that his followers are the salt of the earth, He is counting on us to fight decay and corruption. We live in a society where people in increasingly larger percentages falling away, drifting away, even running away from the organized church. The God-ordained institution of marriage between male and female has been under attack for decades, and it is under attack today. The sanctity of human life beginning at conception all the way to our death beds has been savaged, 60 plus unborn lives have been legally terminated, what St. Paul wrote to Timothy about the end times has come true - we have become **lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to our parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.**

Listen carefully, the decay and corruption isn't just out there in society somewhere, it's here in our family circles, in our work places, the stain of sin is on our hearts, the messed up motives are in our minds, the crookedness is inside of our souls.

Before we can understand what it means for us to be the salt of the earth, we need to see Jesus as the original salt of the earth. When the people of Jesus' day kicked him in the shins, he did not retaliate. When they hurled insults at him, he did not hurl back. When they slapped and spit and savaged him, Jesus just stood there, he just knelt there and he took it. He suffered all that we deserved to suffer, he was beaten bloody and crucified until he was half dead and a few hours later, he was dead and buried. So that our sins could be forgiven so that our sorry souls could be saved, so that there could be a light at the end of every one of our tunnels.

Jesus Christ is the original salt of the earth, He has invited us to join him in a mission to live our faith in such a way that sin is exposed, to live our faith in such a way that evil is rebuked, to live our faith in such a way that false teaching is called out. **You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?"**

Before refrigeration was invented, salt was absolutely essential as a preservative. Humanity has long known that food packed in salt will not spoil nearly as fast as usual. Scientists tell us that salt not only draws out the liquids in meats that could cause spoilage, but also deters bacteria. Archaeological evidence suggests that dry salting was the most common method of preserving fish, poultry, and all kinds of meat in the ancient world.

A theologian named Besser wrote some time ago that what the world would prefer that we were honey instead of salt. The statistics are clear in these days. Church attendance is in decline nationwide. Fewer and fewer folks want to hear what Bible believing churches have always taught - that there is only one Name by which sinners may be saved, His Name is

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Jesus. More and more there is a desire for the traditional truths of Christianity be sugar coated, watered down, waffled around, or as Besser would say coated with honey instead of preserved with salt.

Jesus says not that we should be the salt of the earth nor that we should try to be the salt of the earth, but that we are the salt of the earth. By definition, salt is salty, and in the same way, by definition, the new life that we have in Jesus Christ is alive with the fruits of the Holy Spirit. By nature, salt would act as a preservative of foods in the ancient world, by nature refrigerators will be doing the work of refrigerating in these days, and according to the new life, that we have in Jesus Christ this week, we will be acting as a preservative on society.

The rhythm of Christianity is that God stoops down into our world with His love in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ, we receive that love, we enjoy that love, we are glad about that love, and then we spend our days looking for neighbors who are hungry for that love. First of all God forgives our sins, we enjoy that forgiveness, we are glad about that forgiveness, and then we spend our days looking for neighbors who are in need of that forgiveness.

What interrupts the rhythm of Christianity is when people want to enjoy the forgiveness of their sins without repenting of those sins. This is where being the salt of the earth can be pretty uncomfortable. As often as we urge other folks to be repenting, that often we find ourselves, as the old saying goes, in effect pouring salt on old wounds. The preaching of the Law never has been all that popular, it isn't today, and it won't be tomorrow. The Church that preaches against the particular sins of today's society will be viewed, in increasing numbers, as unfriendly, as close-minded, as old fashioned, and worse.

The kingdom of God is like a medium sized church in a medium sized city that views herself as the salt of the earth. Like Mr. Dailey the Sunday School Superintendent, they keep on loving people and teaching the Word of God, even when and especially when it doesn't seem to be working. They support the preaching of God's Word both in season and out of season - they live their faith in a way that clings to the traditional and old fashioned truths of God's Word as a way of being the salt of the earth, that is to say, as a way of preserving society from further decay and decline.

Truth #2 is that Christ is counting on Christians to be the light of the world, not shades of gray.

Again, before we can explore what it means for us to be the light of the world, we fix our eyes on Jesus, the original and the authentic light of the world. He is that great light that has shined in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. He is the light that shined

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forth as a baby in a manger, he is the light that shined forth by living a perfect life of obedience, he is the light that shined in public ministry by listening to hurting people and helping them, by seeking out the open sinners and having lunch with them, by going into the dark corners of Galilee and walking alongside of the down and the out. He is the light that took upon his own shoulders all of the darkness and all of the sinfulness and all of the shamefulness of this world, and as you well know, he carried it to the cross where he cried out in the darkness to his Father, why have you forsaken me? Jesus, as you well know, is the light who rose up again on Easter Sunday, and because He is risen, all is well between God and us.

And because all is well between God and us in this sanctuary Sunday after Sunday, we worship, and we receive and we commune and we fellowship, and then we scatter. We scatter as little lights in this world, making sure not to hide the Good News of forgiveness of sins, making sure not to keep to ourselves the peace that only Christ can give, wondering out loud and quietly how can we be letting our lights shine, so that others might see our good works and give praise to our Father in heaven.

Dear friends in Christ, wonder with me today what it means to be a city set on a hill that cannot be hidden. What does it mean to be living our faith in such a way that others see St. Paul Lutheran as a place of refuge, as a place where their deepest needs are met and satisfied by God Himself.

We let our lights shine not so that we would be praised but that God would be praised. We do good works, we befriend our neighbors not so others say what good people we are but so that would say how great God is. We are kind and patient and forgiving not to somehow obtain God's favor, but because he has already favored us.

The kingdom of God is like a medium sized church in a medium sized city full of folks eager to shine their lights and salt the earth as they live out their daily vocations. It's like a grandma who speaks a hard truth to a beloved grandchild with tears in her eyes, it's like a man who sees his co-worker going down the wrong path in life and he gets down on his knees this week asking the Lord for courage and for wisdom as he looks for an opportunity to intervene. It's like a woman who walks alongside her friend going through valleys of deep depression and anxiety. It's like a teenager who has lunch with the classmate nobody else will have time for. It's like a congregation of believers who understands that Jesus has invited us to be living our faith in such a way that hurting and broken and wounded and struggling folks of all ages and in every station of life are attracted to this sanctuary as a place of refuge, a proclamation of old-fashioned truth, and a beacon of hope. In Jesus' Name. Amen.