

Salt and Light
Isaiah 58: 1-9; 1Corinthians 2:1-12; Matthew 5:13-20
February6, 2011

“Pass the salt please.” That's a common phrase heard around the dinner table and in restaurants. Some of us have friends and family who are on low salt or no salt diets, so we make adjustments for that when we prepare a meal for them or when considering where we may go out for a meal. Salt is found in almost every packaged food and drink that we buy. It is used to flavor our food and it is a preservative.

In Jesus' time there was no refrigeration and no preservatives other than salt. You can imagine in the Mediterranean heat that something was needed to keep meats from decaying quickly and that was salt. Salt was also used **medicinally and was believed to be a charm against evil spirits, as well.** It is thought that it was used as a form of currency too, because of its necessity and value to Jesus' culture in so many ways.

So, when Jesus says to us, “You are the salt of the earth,” what is he saying? He is reminding us that we are an essential part of the world. As children of God we **are called to preserve God's mission for the world. That mission being** love, justice, and equality among humankind and all the rest of creation. It is the image of the peaceable kin-dom. “The world spoils and begins to decay when some people have too much power and others have too little, when the **rich get richer and the poor get poorer, [when we cease to care about the environment, God's creation.]** By working to overcome these disparities [and our apathy, people of faith] arrest the decay.”¹ As the salt of the earth we are to, ““loose the bonds of injustice, let the oppressed go free, share [our] bread with the hungry, bring the homeless **poor into [our] house, clothe the naked... '[So that our] light shall break forth** like the dawn.” (Is. 58:7, 8) As the salt of the earth, we are to visit those who are imprisoned, care for the sick, and give drink to those who are thirsty. (Mt. 25: 35, 36)

Jesus says to us clearly “You ARE the salt of the earth” and “You are the light of the world.” He does not say “sometimes you are the salt and sometimes you are the light.” Nor does he say “some of you are the salt,” or “some of you are the light.” **No, we are both.** This is a **definitive statement that requires an intentional response from us.** Jesus continues by saying, “but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for

¹J. Harold McKeithen, Jr. “Salting the Earth” www.goodpreacher.com

anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.” (Mt. 5:13) Now we know that Sodium Chloride, salt, retains its flavor, but Jesus was making the point that sometimes we as human beings lose our saltiness. **Here in the Mid-West we use salt to melt the hardened ice.** A little saltiness in our lives also helps to melt our sometimes hardened hearts.

Many of us have been enthralled with what is happening in Egypt. Our hearts have been moved with the images of women, children, and men standing for change and for a better life. What began as a peaceful **demonstration among the people seeking better for themselves** and for their country turned bloody and violent for a few days. There are images of Christian Egyptians protecting their Muslim sisters and brothers from the violence and caring for them. A CNN reporter shared the following story: “I spoke with a mother who said to me, this is my generations **fault. We allowed for corrupt government and for things** to get this bad and now it is our children who are dying on the streets because we failed them. We, meaning her generation, should have done something. This was the mother of a 19 year old young man in the midst of the fighting there on the streets of Cairo.” A mother who spoke of her generations complacency in Egypt. As Americans we too must take responsibility **for remaining quiet during each of our Administrations after Hosni Mubarak** assumed the Presidency in Egypt in 1981. Our various Administrations have turned their backs on the numerous human rights violations and other misdeeds committed by Mubarak and his regime because he has proven to be an ally in war, and perhaps most important is the Suez Canal in which oil tankers pass. We lose our saltiness when our comfort and convenience takes precedence over the lives of others. **We lose our saltiness when complacency and apathy are mistaken for being “tired.”** There is no justice in that. **“Justice is not about, just us!!”**

We must constantly ask ourselves is the social, economic and spiritual relationship between me or my group and others **truly what God would expect of us?(Baxter)** **In asking the question** we must in turn be willing to hear one another. We must not only ask, but we must also listen!

We must be willing to listen not only to one another, but also to our still speaking God. For our salt, our light, & our faith to remain we must be intentional not only in our care for one another, but also intentional about our relationship with God, reading scripture, being in prayer, being present for **worship, being in community with one another,** and coming together at the

communion table. It is in each one of these that we find our saltiness and light strengthened in the Spirit of God. It is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, which helps us to gain understanding as we study God's word. It is the Holy Spirit who calls us to see beyond ourselves and encourages us to go out into the **world seeking justice, helping the poor, to visit the sick and imprisoned**, and to show compassion for all of creation. It is the Holy Spirit who helps us to pray. It is the Holy Spirit that reassures us of God's presence in our lives.

In honor of African American history month I was asked by a friend which of the noted African Americans did I like most. My response was all of them for varying reasons but if I had to choose just one I would choose Sojourner Truth because her life was the epitome of being salt and light to the world. Sojourner's given name was Isabella Baumfree. She was owned by a **Danish family the first nine years of her life and only spoke Danish. When she was sold, at 9**, to English speaking slave owners they beat her repeatedly for not knowing English and so she said she learned the language quickly. Her life was filled with abusive slave owners, thereafter, until one day she took her baby, Sophia, and walked away from her slave owner's home and she prayed asking God for direction **in the midst of her fear. The Holy Spirit**, the Spirit of God, led them to the home of Isaac and Maria van Wagener who purchased Isabella's freedom and insisted she call them by their names and not *master* or *mistress*. **Salt and light in her life.** It was in their home that Isabella regularly attended the Methodist church and one day she became “overwhelmed with the **greatness of the Divine presence**” **and felt the call to preach.** It was then that she changed her name to Sojourner Truth. “She quickly became known as a remarkable preacher whose influence 'was miraculous.’”² Sojourner not only preached, but she spoke publicly against slavery and for women's rights. Her most noted speech was “Ain't I A Woman” that included this:

“That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man **could heed me! And ain't I a woman? I could work** as much and eat as much as a man - when I could get it - and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a

²<http://www.lkwdpl.org/wihohio/trut-soj.htm>

woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?"³

Isabella endured the hardships of slavery. Sojourner still bore the marks of that cruelty, but she did not get stuck in the darkness of injustice upon injustice. She sought the light of the spirit **of God and she in turn let that light within her shine in the world** around her. She was without a doubt tired and weary throughout her life, she had every reason to **be angry with God and to doubt God's presence in her life. She could have** listened to the voices of those who said to her “not only are you not a woman, but you aren't even a human being.” No, Sojourner was present at worship, she listened, she knew what it was to be in prayer, and though she could not read the Holy Spirit gifted her with the power to remember what she learned in worship and the Holy Spirit allowed this woman to spread **the good news of God's love for all people in both African American and Caucasian congregations.** She was able to look at the circumstances of her life and identify the inhumanity of human beings as just that, human actions, and she was able to look upon her life, her ability to endure and to overcome, as the power of God that had to be shared to help others do the same. She was salt and light not only to her generation, but her life and her **life story remain salt and light for us today! For she** was not only a woman, but she was a living example of the power of the presence of God in one's life.

Jesus says to us, “You are the salt and the light of the world.” In saying that Jesus is telling us do not be complacent and apathetic. If we are going to be the salt and light, we must be in relationship with God and grow spiritually, we **are to pray without ceasing, “loose the bonds of injustice,** let the oppressed go free, share our bread with the hungry, bring the homeless poor into our house, clothe the naked... ’ [So that our] light shall break forth like the dawn.” (58:7, 8) We must give drink to those who thirst, care for the sick, and visit those who are **imprisoned, care for creation. Jesus says that as the salt and light** of the world we must, ‘Love [our] neighbor as [we love ourselves.]’” (Mt. 22) We must be active and intentional in our world, as people of faith, trusting the

³Ibid

spirit of God to be present with us, strengthening us, and guiding us along the way! Amen