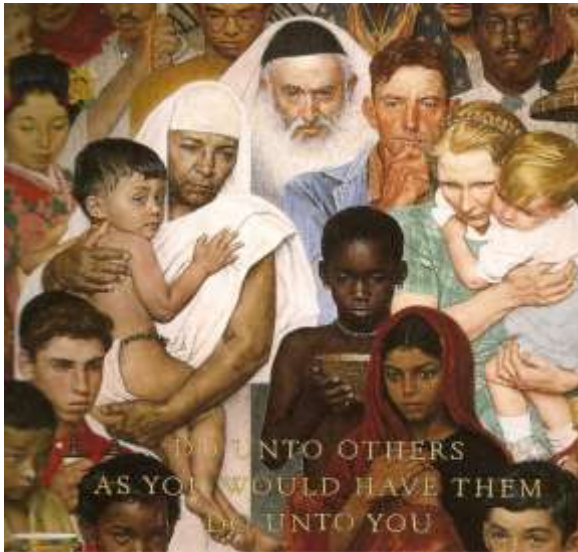


## Matthew 5:13-20

Jesus 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 under-foot. You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. 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 your Father 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.



Gracious Spirit, as we gather at Jesus' table of remembrance, as salt and light for the furtherance of Your Will, give us something to do in Christ's name. Amen.

## "Becoming Our Best Selves"

"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 under-foot."

Mt. 5:13

After opening up his Sermon on the Mount with the Beatitudes, Jesus addressed the crowd saying: "You who mourn, you who are gentle and meek, you who seek mercy, you who are persecuted because you follow me, you who seek to be in the presence of God . . . You must add zest to the life of the whole world" (Hare, *Matthew Interpretation*). In ancient Israel, salt was used to strengthen flavor and preserve food; it was rubbed on newborn children; used to seal covenants; sprinkled on sacrifices; and was understood as a metaphor for wisdom. In the religious life of Jews, salt was associated with the gracious activity of God. In Christianity, theologian Robert Hoch suggests that the power of salt describes "the intensification of our being in fellowship with Christ in the world" (*New Proclamation Year A 2011*).

In his book, 'On Being a Christian', Catholic theologian Hans Kung wrote: 'The question is inescapable: What is there special about Christianity? According to the earliest testimony and that of tradition as a whole, the special feature of Christianity is again this Jesus himself, who is constantly freshly known and acknowledged as Christ . . . The special feature, the most fundamental characteristic of Christianity is that it considers this Jesus as ultimately decisive, definitive, archetypal, for human being's relations with God, and with one's fellow man.'

Who, then, is Jesus to us?" Is He the Holy One who corrects every negative image of God that we have created and internalized in the halls of our own minds? Perhaps a god who abandons and forsakes, is vengeful and punishing, distant and uncaring, cold and judgmental, powerless and unjust? And does our internalized image of Jesus (Christi Imago) have the energy to transform our distorted images so that we can experience our Heavenly Parent as Jesus did, as Abba? Does it help us claim our birth status as beloved children of God?

When we gather at the Lord's Table, we come to remember the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, The Holy One who intimately knew God. We come to intensify our fellowship with Christ in order to love God and our neighbor, Jesus style. In his Still Speaking Daily Devotional, 'Do This in Remembrance of Me,' Rev. Martin Copenhaver wrote: 'When I hear Jesus say, "Do this in remembrance of me," I often think of fishing, of all things. Although I have fished throughout my life, it still strikes me as a most unlikely endeavor. But fishing means something else to me. You see, I used to fish with my father and everything about it reminds me of him. The sound of the tackle box when I carry it. The smell of the box when I open it. The distant splash of the lure after a good, long cast. So, soon after my father died, I went fishing. I could have spent the afternoon talking about my father, telling stories, reading old letters. But in some mysterious and real way, this was something more. If our memories are profound, they simply outgrow words and one longs for something more than a story, something that looks and feels more like life itself. That is, one wants to do something. Do this in remembrance. Do this because you remember. Do this in order to remember. Jesus obviously knew how important it would be for his followers to have something more than stories to tell after he is gone. So he gave them something to do in remembrance, and what he chose was a simple meal, something they had shared many times, and would share many times after he is gone.'

"You are the light of the world.

A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.

No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, 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 Heavenly Parent."

Mt. 5:14-16

Here 'Matthew spoke of Jesus by recalling the words of the prophet Isaiah (9:2), that "the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light." In short, Jesus challenged Israel to be Israel.

He reminded them of their Holy calling to be God's blessing to those feeling lost, in despair, confused, and those who had no idea which way to turn. As disciples of Jesus, we find our way in Him, and in turn, we're called to be the Body of Christ, a church community of faith that shines the light of Jesus into the darkest corners of our world.

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Mt. 5:20

When it comes to shining that light upon those we consider our enemies, Rev. Pavlovitz calls following Jesus, 'Radical Extremism. 'Radical Extremism is the essence of The Cross and the life of Jesus; a confounding, expectation-defying, hate-rattling decision to love defiantly in the face of violent intolerance. It's the greatest thing a Christian can aspire to; not might or force or payback or revenge. It is in cultivating a heart which spends itself on behalf of the hurting, the forgotten, the silenced, the wounded in the most audacious manner, even to the point of its breaking.' I call it raising the bar for what we do for the sake of our Loving God in the name of Jesus.

Last Sunday, as a follow-up to our Howard Lecture which was given by Louellyn Lambros, I attended a radical, raising the bar kind of meeting of 'The Broken Ring Ministry' at the Messiah Baptist Church in Brockton. Folks there are creating a Station of Hope to serve incarcerated souls and their families. Remember how Jesus said: "I was in prison and you came to visit me"? Well this community of faith is deepening its relationship with Jesus by being a church that is a Station of Hope in Southeast Massachusetts. They are becoming a part of Healing Communities whose mission it is to reach out to those who have disobeyed social norms with infractions of various kinds to give compassionate care. Rather than exclusively focusing on punishment which may include arrest, incarceration, and a lifetime of hardship and exclusion from society upon release, they are doing things to heal harms done and to restore offenders to the status of beloved members of the community. 'This little light of theirs, let it shine, let it shine, let it shine!