

Sermon #226
Matt. 5:13-16
October 22, 2017

Salt and Light Christians

“Oh no, there he goes again!” I looked at my cards and could tell that my partner, Bob, was squirming a little. Then I looked at the faces of the others and knew that Bob was at it again. He was ready to take a big risk.

This is the scenario that took place many a time when Rachel and I played the Euchre card game with Rachel’s mom, Bonnie, and her step-Dad, Bob. Usually Bob and I would be partners and Rachel and her mom were partners. We would enjoy playing many games of Euchre whenever we were at their house.

How many of you have every played the game of Euchre? It is a four-player trump game where the players are paired to form two partnerships. Each person has an opportunity to pick trump based on the card that is first turned up. The team must win at least three tricks in order to get a point, if not, they are “euchred” and the other team receives two points. When it came to Bob’s turn, he would often pick the trump, even if he didn’t have that many top cards. And believe it or not, he almost always won or he would get lucky and play right into my hand. He was a winner and a risk-taker.

Is risk-taking part of the Christian life? Well, according to Bishop Robert Schanche the answer is yes. Now that doesn’t mean the same way as in a game of Euchre, but it does involve risk. We are currently in a series of sermons based on Bishop Schnase’s book, *The Five Fruitful Practices*. Can anyone remember what the first three are? The first Sunday we focused on Radical Hospitality, then Passionate Worship, and last week Intentional Faith Development. Today we turn our attention to Risk-taking Mission and Service.

Question: When it comes to mission and service, what does a risk taking Christian look like? Jesus has the answer in Matt. 5:13-16.

This is part of a sermon or series of sermons that Jesus preached from a mountain top first to his disciples and secondarily to the crowd on the outside listening in. So, it’s a message primarily for Christians. It’s early on in Jesus’ ministry. He has already called his disciples and begun the transformation in their lives. And he has just begun his public ministry. In the first part of the sermon, he proclaims blessings on his followers, better known as the beatitudes. (I.e. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, etc.) And now he begins to describe in more detail what the Christian life is all about, and he does so by using two metaphors that help us understand what a risk-taking mission and service is all about.

- I. Risk-taking mission and service involves salt and light

Jesus uses two declarative statements to define Christian life and mission. He says, “You are the salt of the earth.” And “You are the light of the world.” Notice that these are present tense realities. If you have asked Jesus to change your life, forgive you of your sins, and you are walking in step with him, then you are already salt and light of the earth. It’s not maybe you are that way, or you should be like that. Nor does it mean that in the future you will be that way. It is not something you have to earn like a quality or a higher level of life that only the super saints enjoy. It’s something you inherit, because Christians already are salt and light of the earth. They have already received Jesus Christ, just like the blessings (3-12). So, what do these metaphors imply anyways? First, let’s look at the actual substances.

A. What is salt?

I have many different types of salt shakers here that show how much we like our salt, right? (Show the different kinds of salt shakers). In the ancient world, salt was used in three ways. First, as a preservative. They didn’t have refrigeration like we do today, so they used salt to preserve their perishable goods. Second, salt also gives taste or flavor. Salt is the only substance that can make all other ingredients taste even better. Pepper can’t do that. Third, salt was also used in the Jewish worship rituals when offering up sacrifices to God, which was God’s requirement in Leviticus. The second metaphor is light.

B. What is light?

Light gives sight. Light enables us to see. I’m sure most of you have been in a place that was totally dark and you couldn’t see your hand in front of your face. Let’s look on the table and see what types of lights I have here. (Show the different types of light). I know what it is like to preach in the darkness in Ecuador when the electricity goes out and I preach only by flickering candlelight. Thankfully there was at least a candle. So, salt and light have very important functions in this world and the Bible uses both as metaphors and uses them both often.

In Mark 9:50 Jesus says, “Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other.” Col. 4:6 says to “Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt.” And concerning the light, Isaiah 60:19 says, “The Lord will be your everlasting light.” The light we have is not our own, but it comes from the Lord. Jesus himself said in John 8:12, “I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

This all leads to another important point that Jesus was making in his Sermon on the Mount. Just as salt and light have their functions, so Christians are to use their salt and light that come from above.

II. Risk-taking mission and service requires action in the world.

“You are the salt of the earth” (v. 13). And “You are the light of the world” (v. 14), Jesus says. The salt must not stay in the salt-shaker (hold it up). The light must be lit or turned on (hold it up). They weren’t made only to be pretty ornaments or decorations on a table. They were made for use. We are to use our God-given salt and light to preserve and to add flavor in this world. And we are to shine brightly in the darkness. We give light like a city on a hill side that cannot be hidden and like a lamp that is not to have a bowl put over it, but rather must be open to give light to everyone in the room.

In Ephesians 5:8, Paul taught young Christians their purpose when he wrote, “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.” Light must be lived out in Christian living 24/7 every day of the week and not just on Sundays or Wednesdays. It must be shown to make light in the darkness.

And according to Jesus, salt also has a purpose. It must not lose its saltiness or otherwise it is just thrown out and trampled underfoot. Luke’s account (14:35), Jesus even more graphically says, “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out.” Salt is to be used. These salt shakers are not just for decoration. They have a purpose. The Greek word used for losing saltiness can also mean “to become tasteless,” or “to become foolish.” Truly a Christian who becomes tasteless, has also become foolish, because salt is intended to leave the salt shaker and be put to good use. And the implication here is that Christians can lose their saltiness. How do we lose our saltiness? How can we lose our light? Or how does it become dim?

There are many ways our salt can lose its saltiness and our light become dim. The main way occurs through lack of prayer. If you don’t have a solid prayer life, your light is dimming. We are only as effective as our prayer life. If we don’t read, study, and memorize God’s Word, we lose our saltiness. Likewise, when we fail to witness, share our testimony, or give generously to others and to God’s mission work, then our light dims. Or when we start believing false doctrines, fail to live under the authority of the Lordship of Jesus Christ, or believe that our sins really don’t matter when they do, our salt loses its taste, and our light becomes weaker.

But there is hope – hope for all of us no matter the condition of our salt and light. Madeline Carrasco Henners is a pastor in the South Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church where she has served for eleven years. Five short years ago she began a spiritual renewal journey herself. She spent a short sabbatical away from her church because she sensed a need for rest and renewal. During her prayer and Bible time she asked the Lord, “Please fill my heart, I need more of you.” And as he did, she felt a weight lifting from her shoulders and the Lord said clearly, “I need you in the Word, this gospel that you’re reading. I need you to see what you’ve added that’s not here.” That’s when a big life change occurred for her.

Whether it is clergy or laity, we all need a renewal of God’s salt and light in our lives, which comes through prayer, the study of God’s Word, and authentic worship. We all need renewal because we all must come out of the salt shaker and turn our light

brighter and be used for God completely and in a holy way. Risk-takers for Jesus must continue to keep their lamps burning brightly. We need to be in earnest prayer today for our community and nation, our church, both our local church and our denomination.

I have joined a group within the United Methodist Church, called the Wesleyan Covenant Association that has banded together to pray for our church and support our doctrinal heritage, the authority of Scripture, and the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We want to see revival in our large church. We need a Holy Spirit revival in our church and in us. Without that, we cannot be salt and light. But with him, we can be renewed for risk-taking mission and service.

III. Risk-taking mission and service is done for the glory of God.

This is the ultimate purpose of being salt and light Christians. We live not to please ourselves, but to glorify God. The Christian is to be salt and light, rooted in God's Word, and ready to shine Jesus' light before others so that "they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (v. 16).

A worship service was completely full when a young homeless man stepped foot inside the sanctuary for the first time. There were no seats to be found. He walked around the aisles for a few minutes and then sat right down on the floor in one of the aisles. The head usher went over to him and without saying a word, sat down on the floor with him for the rest of the service. Truly his was a moment of risk-taking mission that glorified God the father.

I see our church doing the same type of thing. We do spend time with those who are homeless or outcast. We do that in our Wed. evening meals, our food pantry, our worship services, and much more. We are a living example. That doesn't mean we don't need to grow more or be further renewed by the Holy Spirit. But we are an example of reaching out to others for the glory of God. I was talking with Sue Nilsen Kibbey the other day, one of our consultants and many of you know her. She told me, "I see Belmont UMC as a truly salt and light church much more than many other churches I know. You have begun to really know the people in your area and reach out to them." That brings glory to God. Risk taking mission and service begins here in worship, and it goes out beyond the four walls of this church to the community. We truly want the Belmont community and beyond to experience a salt and light church in their midst.

In the bulletin, you will find an insert that shows ways that you can be involved in the ongoing ministry of Belmont UMC to make new and growing disciples of Jesus Christ. Please take a few minutes and fill that out and bring it up and place it on the altar during the last hymn or pray more about it and bring it to the office or worship next Sunday. This a simple way to explore how to use your salt and light influence.

Rev. Allan Bevere, a United Methodist pastor in our conference tells the story of meeting a homeless man outside a McDonald's restaurant. The man asked if Allan would give him some money for food. Rev. Bevere replied, "I can do better. I'll take

you inside and buy you a meal.” So he did. They both ordered their meals and were about to go and sit at separate tables, but on the spur of the moment Allan said, “Why don’t you come join me.” The man looked a little surprised, but replied, “Sure thing.” Allan said it was hard to enjoy his meal noting that the man probably had not had a bath in some time. The taste of his food was laced with foul body odor. He learned much about this man who appeared to be intelligent and articulate. But his home life had been anything but pleasant and he had nowhere to go. The man had a sister living in Florida, so after the meal Allan offered to drive him to the bus station and pay a one-way ticket for him to go see his sister. But the man refused and said tearfully, “Nobody back home wants me.”

They talked a little longer and then as the man was getting ready to leave he said to Allan, “You know, everyone who buys me dinner takes their food and sits somewhere else, leaving me to sit by myself; but you sat with me and talked to me and spent time with me. I often feel very lonely, and I have gotten used to rejection and to being ignored. Thanks for your time.” Allan let his light shine through the care of another person, and God was glorified.

Conclusion

Risk-taking mission and service is much more than taking a risk in a card game. There are many unknowns in the card game, but with Jesus, the light of the world, no risk is too great. (Hold up the salt shaker.) Are you ready to be poured out of the saltshaker today and into the world? (Hold up the flash light.) Are you ready to let Jesus renew your light so that it might shine brightly and bring glory to your Father in heaven?