

## **You Are .....**

Isaiah 58: 1-12

Matthew 5:13-20

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### *Isaiah 58: 1-12*

Shout out, do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet! Announce to my people their rebellion, to the house of Jacob their sins. Yet day after day they seek me and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments, they delight to draw near to God. “Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?” Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers. Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high. Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am. If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.

### *Matthew 5:13-20*

“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 hid. 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 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.

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You are created in the image of God.  
You are a beloved child of God.  
You are blessed.  
You are welcomed.  
You are forgiven.  
You are encouraged.  
You are redeemed.  
You are the light of the world.  
You are the salt of the earth.  
You are the salt of the .....oven.

We are many things according to Jesus' teachings, some of which comfort us, some of which challenge us, and some of which confuse us.

'You are the salt of the earth,' is such a common expression, such a cliché, that many people may not even be aware that it is biblical. We hear the complimentary phrase and know that it means you are a good person, someone easy going, easy to talk to and be comfortable around. However, our clichéd compliment has wildly tamed Jesus' meaning.

Jesus spoke Aramaic, the common, everyday language of Judea. For religious purposes he would have known some Hebrew and some Greek, but in his day to day conversations, in his teachings and his preaching, he would have been speaking Aramaic. And in the first century Mideast ovens were made of earth so the word for earth, the word for oven, was the same word. "You are the salt of the earth," "You are the salt of the oven."

To light the oven most people burned dried manure and they used salt to ignite it. Because salt accumulated in huge piles along the sea there was plenty for everyone, but the salt had to be pure in order to ignite the ovens. Old salt would not, and so was useless. It would be thrown out and trampled underfoot,

So when Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth," he was teaching that the disciples, that we, are what is used to ignite something, to kindle something, to make something burn and get it going. *We are*—not *we will* be—not *we can* be—and we are not just good people, but we already *are* what lights, kindles, kickstarts and radiates the work that Jesus has called us to do.

When salt ignites the earth, flame is kindled and the light shines, burns, radiates.

"You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world."

Professor, author and retreat leader Karoline Lewis<sup>1</sup> says that "These are great and holy attributes and promises of discipleship. But Jesus does not stop there. With this blessing comes responsibility. It's one thing to know and to claim your identity. It's another thing entirely to live it. But, we have to. Why? For the sake of the kingdom of heaven coming to pass here and now and not just in our future." The focus of the Sermon on the Mount that began with the Beatitudes is how to live a life pleasing to God and the attributes of Christian discipleship are how knowledge becomes action. Action is our knowledge with a purpose. "As disciples, we have to be the activity of God in the world. We are called to live out our identity as salt and light." What we have ignited is not to be dimmed under the bushel basket, but set out on the lampstand, to give light to all in the house and glory to God.

What has been ignited is not to just be a cliched compliment or a tamed single candlelight or gently glowing embers as the disciples, we, the salt of the earth, the light of the world, live out our great and holy attributes and promises of discipleship, our blessing and identity that comes with responsibility.

What Jesus was teaching the disciples, was teaching us, on the mount that day was nothing truly new, but a message that the prophet Isaiah had shared 600 years earlier, yet now in a whole new light. Jesus relied heavily on his Jewish tradition and heritage as he did not come to abolish the law or the prophets but rather to fulfill them, to bring them to completion. The very things that God had spoken through Isaiah loudly and clearly, the things that God required, were also what Jesus required: to not worship in ways that were hollow, to untie and release those trapped in the bonds of injustice and oppression, to share our bread and our homes and our clothing, to stop speaking evil of others and to satisfy the needs of the afflicted.

Injustice, oppression, hunger, homelessness, poverty, nakedness, blame and slander are God's concerns in the prophetic voice of Isaiah, and they are Jesus' concerns taught on Mount Eremos. The divine concerns can be physical, emotional and spiritual. People can hunger for a meal as well as hunger for love, for affection, for attention. People can be homeless on the streets and homeless within themselves. Nakedness may be insufficient clothing but it may mean hopelessness. Blame and slander can be bullying and they can be false words of disgust turned inward.

When salt ignites the earth, flame is kindled and the light shines, burns, radiates.

"You are the salt of the earth." You are the light of the world that shall break forth like the dawn breaking the darkness, and gloom will be like noonday.

We—the Church- are salt and light. By faith, by following Jesus, we are able to go into the darkest, the emptiest, the untamed places of need, to restore the streets so that people can live safely, to repair the breach of our deeply damaged ways of treating one another, to break open the bonds of injustice, to burn brightly for all the world to see.

We—Smith Church- are salt and light. As we prepare to gather for our annual meeting next week, as we earth Jesus' first major teaching into our church and our time, as we look back on last year at what we have done as a community of faith, as followers of Jesus Christ, we will also look ahead to where God is calling and leading, to the places and the ways that we are igniting and kindling and radiating light, our promises of faith, and our responsibilities because we are the salt of the oven. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revision-common-lectionary/fifth-sunday-after-epiphany/commentary-on-matthew-513-20-2>