

“Who Are You and Why Are You Here?”

Second in a Lenten Series

...you're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth and light that brings out the God-colors in the world. -Matt. 5:13 and 16

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Prayer

Message

I begin by talking about two things:

Both of which are ancient and modern.

Some people avoid these things together.

Yet, some can't seem to get enough.

Both are good in moderation.

A little goes a long way.

It's bad if you lose one or you get too much of either.

Both either preserves, restores, rejuvenates, or is good for the skin and soul.

What am I referring to? Salt and Light

My favorite salt story, and forgive me if you have heard it before, is about the year my mom accidentally put salt in the thanksgiving pie instead of sugar! It rates right up with the year she forgot sugar all together in the pie.

My favorite light story, and I don't think you have heard this one, is when my dad and I drove out into the Red Desert; a high altitude desert in west central Wyoming. We left the cabin while it was still dark and drove out to see if we could catch a glimpse of the wild horses. What we saw instead was an incredible sunrise. The light seemed to spread across the sky in every color of morning you can imagine. Then clouds rolled in and swallowed it all up, except for one small opening. The light poured through the hole and onto the red hills and red dirt,

setting ablaze everything it touched. Dad and I just stood alongside the truck and watched as it traveled across the desert floor.

We continue our walk into Lent asking questions that challenge us to reflect on who we are and what we are to be about as individuals and as a church. Today's text brings us closer to the answer using Jesus' words regarding salt, light, and a about peer pressure from the pharisees.

As part of what is considered his greatest sermon, Jesus speaks to his followers about who they are and what they are to be about in the world that surrounded them. It is important to note that the "you" in today's text is plural. Like here in Indiana when we say "you all", y'all, all you all, or you'ins.

Jesus had just finished speaking about what is called, "the beatitudes" in chapter five of the gospel of Matthew. Then picking up with verse 13 Jesus shifts to a description about those who believe in him and discusses the answer to the question, "who you are to why you are here?"

Read Matt. 5:13-20 MSG

To be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. To be light that brings out the God-colors in the world. Oh, to be that kind of a believer in today's world! Plain and simple that is the answer to the questions of who we are and why we, as followers of Jesus, are here.

We know the value of salt and light. We understand the metaphor don't we? Salt is a preservative - keeps things from turning rotten or bad; preserves the flavor and condition of what it is applied to. Salt enhances the natural flavor of what it is applied to. It brings out the best. We know that right? Light shows the path ahead of us. Light illuminates the darkness. Light offers security, safety, and assures travelers of safe passage. Light brings comfort. We know that right? Then why does it get messed up? Why do we let it get complicated with rules, regulations,

policy, procedure, and the like? Because of what one author calls, “peer pressure from the Pharisees (of this world).”

In and of itself, there is nothing wrong with peer pressure except when the pressure dominates others. Peer pressure can both help us and hurt us. Peer pressure can inspire us to do the right thing like picking up good habits from someone you are around frequently. It can motivate us to take positive action and get things done, like watching your neighbor clean up their yard, do some landscaping, etc., might motivate you to do the same.

Peer pressure can also hurt us when we find ourselves exposed to the very best of the best peers and find ourselves discouraged and want to quit. In other words, it's one thing to train for a 5K with someone who is a little bit of a better runner than you are. This allows you to work hard, be challenged but not feel crushed, judged, or overwhelmed. . It's another thing to train for a 5K with an elite olympic athlete. You'll quit before you even get started because what's the point?!

In Jesus' day, the elite, the olympians of things Jewish; the religiously trained, the couldn't be beat, super-stars of the Jewish Law, were the pharisees. They were the religious leaders and teachers. Very few, if any, could live up to their standards or expectations. They were well versed in the books of Moses, called the Torah, the first 5 books of the bible. They knew their history, the prophecy of the one to come, and they knew the religious rules and regulations. With all that came authority, power, judgement and expectations of others. That is what they put their righteousness, their right-ness in - knowing and following the rules; the law. Their righteousness was rooted in those rules and regulations and making sure everyone else followed them too!

I sometimes think the pharisees get a bad rap. They weren't necessarily bad people. Not all of them. They weren't necessarily heartless. But when all was said and done, after years and years of study, commentary, and academic reflection, it is pretty much agreed that the pharisees in and around Jesus' day were trying to be good for the wrong reasons. They believed in and kept the law so much that it kept

them from recognizing the essence or heart of the law. Later in Matthew, Jesus calls the pharisees hypocrites because they give all their attention to “do this this way but not that” of the law that they completely miss the “weightier matters: justice, mercy and faith.” (22:23). It’s been said that Jesus respected the pharisees’ passion for the law but criticized their failure to put it into action. They couldn’t see how Jesus was the fulfillment of the exact law, prophecy, and tradition they devoted their life to. And that is why they were against him.

In other words church, the pharisees failed to be salt and light to the world around them. They were consumed with being the right kind of salt or the perfect type of salt. They were too busy weighing, monitoring and judging the salt of others, that they failed to be salt themselves. They were too worried about measuring, calculating, and criticizing their light and the light of others, that they weren’t able to shine for anyone else. I think the pharisees knew who they were but they missed why they were there.

Let us not make the same mistake. Let us not define our righteousness - our right-ness of following Jesus; our being salt and light by rules, limitations, and monitoring others, but rather claim our righteousness; our right-ness by following Jesus’ example.

What do righteous people look like? Jesus says, the righteous are “the salt of the earth” (vs. 13). He doesn't say, the righteous try to be the salt of the earth. He doesn’t say, “it might be good for you to take a class at Salt and Light University to learn how to be salt and light” or “go to the elders and have them lay hands on you, beseeching God to grant you saltiness.” He doesn’t say “take 30 minutes every morning to meditate and try to reach and be in touch with your inner saltiness and your inner light.”

His comment is straightforward. Remember he is talking to his followers as individuals yes, but more importantly as a group - as a whole - as a body of believers. You are the salt of the earth. This is what and who you are. Too often, we’re afraid that we’re not salty enough, we need to do more, prepare more, expect

more, and when we focus on that, we're essentially making this all about ourselves instead of Jesus. Whatever Jesus actually had in mind when he said "you are the salt of the earth" we know that salt as an element has no value to itself. It's not about making salt better salt. The value of salt is in its application to other things - to other people. Jesus calls us salt because we who claim to believe in and follow Jesus are meant to make life better for others, not harder. We are called to enhance life for others not make it bitter for them. We are to preserve life for others not stifle, destroy or defeat who they are.

What do righteous people look like? They look like light - flashlights, lamplight, candlelight, spotlight, floodlight, and more. It is who we are as individuals but more so as a body of believers. "We all shine like the stars but together we blaze like the sun."

Like salt, light does not exist for its own benefit, but for the benefit of everything and everyone it illuminates. Light provides warmth, energy, and security in the darkness around us. Light encourages life and growth. That is what we are to do as followers of Jesus. Our righteousness as followers of Jesus is about doing whatever we can to be lights to each other and to the world the people, situations, events, circumstances and moments around us. We are to be open and honest instead of hiding in the dark. We are to offer other people warmth and encouragement instead of being cold, disconnected, and discouraging. We are to light the way not dictate the way.

It doesn't mean we turn our backs on the religious law, traditions, or turn our back on our religious heritage and God's law. It does mean we ask ourselves what is the purpose of God's law - what is the essence of those laws, traditions, and heritage? Is it to demoralize, judge, and marginalize others or is it to establish community, order and fellowship in a safe and meaningful way? Is it to be judge and jury - criticizing and convicting? Or does it mean we are to love mercy, show kindness, and walk humbly with God? As followers, we are to revere the laws of Moses and religious traditions,, but more importantly, and what Jesus was trying to

say and model, is we are to recognize and live out the principles embedded within it.

Now it is our turn. The two-fold question brought before us today, on this second weekend of Lent, is this: Who are you Grace Church and Why are you here? Who are you Grace church? AND Why are you here in Franklin, Indiana?

Please take a moment and share your thoughts in response to those two questions on a yellow card or in your sermon notes page and following the service, we invite you to leave your responses in the baskets at the back of the sanctuary.

The power of the season of Lent is that it challenges us to reflect on our identity - as individuals and as a church. Like Jesus establishing, owning, and proclaiming his identity in the desert, we too must come to understand at our deepest level who we are and why we are here. I pray God's Holy Spirit will continue to show us the answer. AMEN