

Go, Therefore... – 2. Let Your Light Shine

Matthew 5:13-16, 28:19-20

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My dad was a career driver- an over the road truck driver who saw millions of miles and countless hours in the road, traveling the country delivering items we all rely on in daily life. He is a skilled driver who knew how to navigate bad weather, unexpected detours, and had an eye for others in need. Overtime, he came to keep well stocked in basic first aid items, both in his truck and our family car. When I began driving, he filled my trunk with basic items so that I too could be safe and help others in need. His time on the road meant that he was often a person at the right place at the right time. But it's his faith which gave him the motivating courage and compassion to act quickly in care of others.

He told me a story of one time he witnessed another driver having a medical emergency on the freeway. The driver was moving slow, but a bit erratically, struggling to find a safe way to stop. My Dad quickly moved to act. He navigated his truck near this driver, and used his CB radio to call for help. Soon, other drivers made their way through the traffic to drive next to each other creating a blockade in the road, to keep other vehicles behind them.

I'm sure other drivers, or knowing the situation, we're upset by all these semis blocking the road. But together, they created a safe path for the distressed driver to pull over. Local emergency responders had been contacted by this time, and were able to attend to this drivers needs. And because of my Dads quick thinking, and the actions of his fellow truck drivers- no one was harmed that day, and the freeway was safe from accidents as the distressed driver found help and safety.

As a child, this made me feel like my dad was a superhero. Instead of a cape, he had his expert driving skills and truck to save the day. Now, I still think of my dad of a sort of hero. But more than this, I see a man of faith, who used his gifts to care for others, even in times most unexpected.

I hate to think of what could have happened that day, if not for the fleet of drivers to create a safe space on the freeway. They found themselves at the right place, at the right time. We don't often think of truck drivers as heroes on the road, yet many of them can tell you stories like this- where their presence made a difference.

As Methodists, we practice social holiness, which means we believe that our faith calls us into right action. That we love God and our neighbor by putting our faith into action. *Now I don't know if any of those drivers were Methodist, but they all sure acted like one in that moment.*

"Wesley has said, 'There is no religion that is not social, no holiness that is not social.' Wesley goes on to say that without social holiness, we cannot exist. It is because of God's love for us and Christ's love that we reach out into the world to walk with others and to accompany them in their journeys."¹

Sometimes this means noticing the behavior of other drivers in the road. And sometimes that means noticing the struggles and needs of our neighbor. Throughout its history, there are countless stories of Methodists who found their faith intimately tied to the care of their neighbor.

Dorothy Height was on such Methodist. She's called the "Godmother of the civil rights movement." She worked alongside Dr King. And was the only woman, besides Coreys Scott King, on the platform when King gave his historic "I have a dream" speech. She helped finish the work earlier voting-rights activists had begun. And her hard work also helped pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. It was said of her:

“Dr. Height was the embodiment of leadership in the Wesleyan Way, She understood that love of God could not be separated from love of neighbor and that love of neighbor was not simply a feeling but an action.”²

Love is an action. Faith, is not only what we believe, but how we live.

This is week two of our series “Go, therefore” which is centered around the words of Jesus from the end of Matthew’s Gospel. As I mentioned last week, just after Jesus resurrection he gives a final command to his followers. Telling them, if anything you’ve seen and heard has made any difference in your life: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.... “

Jesus isn’t speaking just of conversion experiences, but rather is inviting his followers into a lifetime and *lifestyle* of loving God by loving one’s neighbor. Of putting faith into action, because faith is not something meant to *just* be held in your heart, rather following Jesus means tuning your heart to the melody and rhythm of God’s grace. Living in such harmony that the melody of your life reveals the goodness of Jesus thru your words and actions.

These words, which we call the Great Commission, are among the final words Jesus leaves with his disciples – but its not the first time Jesus had left directives for the disciples to tell the story of God in Christ.

One other example of this is in Matthew 5, where we read:

“You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its saltiness, how will it become salty again? It’s good for nothing except to be thrown away and trampled under people’s feet. You are the light of the world. A city on top of a hill can’t be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they put it on top of a lampstand, and it shines on all who are in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before people, so they can see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven.”

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

These are holy attributes and marks of discipleship, but with them comes a great responsibility. Because “it is one thing to know and claim your identity, it’s another thing entirely to live it”³.

Be salt. Be light. These are metaphors for how we are called to live. As elements that enhance flavor and also serve as a protector in food storage. As elements that illumine a path, and are easily spotted from a distance.

Now there are THREE things I want to highlight about this passage today:

Notice first the tense Jesus speaks:

You ARE the salt of the earth. You ARE the light of the world.

Jesus is not speaking about something that happens in the distant future. Nor is Jesus talking about how we will be when we work hard enough, get our degrees, find extra free time... Jesus says right now. Right in this very moment: YOU are salt and light.

This is a lesson about the Kingdom of God. A reminder that we are a “both/and” people. Because the Kingdom of God is BOTH here right now, present among us. AND is something that we partner with God in creating, longing for the day when God’s kingdom is fully among us. We proclaim the goodness of God AND we work to make the world a better place. We celebrate the goodness of Jesus’ redemption AND we await the day when

Christ comes again in final victory – where, as the words of Revelation 21 declare, “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more. Mourning, crying, or pain will be no more”

Here at Messiah, we have an active Mission Team. Their work includes designating our Second Mile Offering recipient, as well as the service projects that often accompany them. They help provide volunteer and mission work for people of all ages, and are a really wonderful group that helps Messiah connect “life and purpose.” This week, I chatted with Shirley Buehler, who has served on our Mission Team for three years. She has also worked with ICA for over twenty years. When I asked her about the importance and impact of mission work, she said, “I always have felt that we have a duty and obligation to take care of our communities. I’m a huge supporter of women and food instability. Whenever I do a mission project, it “fills me up.”

We hear this all the time, as people serve. We are blessed when we serve others in love. And others (who might also be us!) are blessed when we *receive* the loving service of others. Jesus invites us to be salt and light *right now*, because there are all around us people who are desperately in need of community. People who need to be seen and loved, who might need help with an extra meals or resources, or maybe just need to know they aren’t alone.

There are countless ways that the people of Messiah have responded to Christ’s invitation to “be salt and light”... and I know there are many more. How might God be stirring in you today? How might your gifts be the “flavor” pointing to God’s grace?

2. A second thing I notice about the language here: in the original Greek, in which this was written, the “YOU” is written in the plural second person. We don’t have a good way to distinguish this in English, so imagine Jesus is speaking to “ya’ll”

YA’LL are the salt of the earth. YA’LL are the light of the world.

This tells us that there is not one single individual that embodies salt or light. Instead, Jesus commands the FULL community to embody the salt and light of Christ. And it is only when we come together, as this full body, that we more clearly can exemplify the image of God, in whom we have all been made.

As I hear this, it helps me understand *why* Jesus spent so much time welcoming those on the margins, pushing the boundaries of what, or who, was expected, and encouraging his followers to do the same. It’s because Jesus sees all of us, as children of God, and knows we are “better together” than apart. Salt is more flavorful. Light shines brighter when we, as the fully body of Christ, are together.

Messiah has long been known for it’s famous “Messiah welcome” -- and though we are not perfect and make mistakes, we also have become a community that can be trusted to care for others, whether or not they are part of this community. We hope you can trust that when you are here, in the building, that you will be respected, warm smiles will greet you, and our leaders and staff will do their part to help make this a positive experience – and this is true whether you’re here for a Messiah event, like worship or small groups, or a community event like a blood drive or scouts.

Even without understanding Greek grammar, we know that Jesus calls “ya’ll” to a shared life of love and service. We want to be a people who expand that welcome to others: especially those who are looking for a place to belong, and those who have experiences with churches that told them that maybe they don’t.

One reason our work surrounding our Inclusion team and statement is so important, is because it helps us learn and expand our welcome.

Jesus says, “Ya’ll are salt. Ya’ll are light... and friends? Ya’ll means ALL”
All of us have a part of God’s family and God’s kingdom.

The metaphors Jesus uses support this, too... What I mean, is that salt is most effective in its work when used with other elements. In the kitchen, salt works in tandem with other foods to bring out flavor. And light, in the absence of anything else, has little function. Rather, for light to be most effective, it must illumine the environment around it.

Now looking around this room, I see many ways that “YA’LL” are being salt and light. Tens of thousands of dollars given for various missions. Hundreds of pillows provided to folks at ReMember, thousands of miles driven by our youth and adult mission teams. Countless times: in big and small ways that each of you have said YES to helping and loving others.

Right outside my office door sits the shelves for Totes for Hope. [SHOW PHOTO](#)

This is a food shelf ministry that began at Messiah in 2018 to support the families at Bloom. Half the families who attend Bloom, the childcare center here at Messiah, receive scholarships and qualify for nutritional support. But the thing I love about Totes for Hope, is that the food provided is for any child, any family here at Bloom.

This is a church-wide ministry, where we live into our “ya’ll”. Mary Tucker is one of our Totes shoppers she said this: “It has grown because of the generous support from the congregation. Half of our Christmas offering was dedicated to Totes for Hope, providing about \$12,000. We also receive donations throughout the year, including gifts of fresh eggs, bread, ground beef and a local CSA share.”

Kay Schulz, another member of the Totes team continued: “We knew the need for food and found this was a perfect way to meet a need with dignity. It has helped families and I’ve seen a stronger connection between Bloom families and Messiah. They know we are there when they need us. It’s opened the door for families to ask for prayers or other support. I feel good knowing the kids, and their families are well fed, enabling them to get a good nights rest and being able to learn and grow.”

And Gail Dahl added this, “As a retired teacher, I wanted to be involved in education of some sorts when I moved here in 2019. Bloom lit my fire! Buying groceries and stocking the shelves has been one tangible way for me to use my hands and feet to serve God.”

When I chatted with Gail, she didn’t even know the passage for today – and did you hear that? This mission “lit a fire” within her. Salt and light, right there. There are SO many ways that people of Messiah church take seriously Christ’s invitation to be salt and light. I’ve said it before, and I’ll say it again: I am proud to be one of your pastors. It is a special thing to be part of a community that continually is finding new ways of saying “yes” to God’s invitations.

Now one last grammar lesson for today...the bulk of these verses include Jesus telling us who we are: Ya’ll are salt. Ya’ll are light. But at the end, Jesus gives a command, saying in verse 16:

In the same way, let YOUR light shine before people so they can see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven.

This is one of my favorite Bible verses, holding many fond memories of using this verse as a blessing to people at their baptism, while handing them a candle and saying: *Let your light shine before people.*

But whose light? I’ve always understood “your” to be “ya’ll”. But instead – Jesus is commanding the light itself. Echoing the very words of God at creation, where God said in Genesis, “let there be light. And there was light.” Here, again, Jesus is in creator mode, commanding the light itself to shine among us.

This is why it matters: Jesus is not *telling* us how to behave. Instead, Jesus is telling us, again, that this essence of God, this light, is *already* shining within us. This means that you cannot pray harder, work harder, study harder, to some *be* a more holy “light bearer”.

It means you can stop waiting for the “someday” when you are ready.

Because, ya’ll.. Jesus says you **ARE** ready, right now.

Christ, who commanded the waves the stop, the dead to rise, has commanded the light to shine within **YOU**.

Our invitation from Jesus is to live in such a way that this light is all the more manifested.

Jesus invites us to allow our core selves, the very ones made in the image of God, and breathed life into us at creation, to be unleashed into the world. This is the goal of Jesus all along: to help you know and trust that you are beloved, made in God’s image. And in turn, to inspire you to live, helping others know and trust their own belovedness.

The gift of God’s grace, is that you do not earn this love, this salt, or this light. Rather, it has been embedded in you at creation. And Jesus says: don’t hide it. Don’t ignore it. Instead, live in the world as people marked and transformed by God. Neither salt nor light exists for themselves. They only fulfill their purpose when used, poured out, and shared.

Love as God loves. Shine as God shines.

Ya’ll *are* the tastiness that adds salt to lives around us.

Ya’ll *are* light that shines upon the kingdom of God.

Thanks be to God: for all ya’ll and for these gifts of salt and light. Let us pray:

God of all creation, source of light and life, and all that is: Thank you for the gift of Jesus, who *is* our light.

Thank you for trusting us to be as salt and light in your world. We celebrate the people and places that we are already at work together, and ask your continued guidance for new people, places, and opportunities that you are already calling us toward. Help us discern your voice, and to be a people whose lives are marked by our love. Amen.

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of August 27, 2023

Weekly Prayer

Good and loving God, you have created, called, equipped, and loved me without end. Empower and encourage me this week, to love you and my neighbor more fully. Amen.

Monday, August 28

Scripture: Matthew 5:1-12 (Common English Bible)

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up a mountain. He sat down and his disciples came to him. He taught them, saying:

“Happy are people who are hopeless, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

“Happy are people who grieve, because they will be made glad.

“Happy are people who are humble, because they will inherit the earth.

“Happy are people who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness, because they will be fed until they are full.

“Happy are people who show mercy, because they will receive mercy.

“Happy are people who have pure hearts, because they will see God.

“Happy are people who make peace, because they will be called God’s children.

“Happy are people whose lives are harassed because they are righteous, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

“Happy are you when people insult you and harass you and speak all kinds of bad and false things about you,

all because of me. Be full of joy and be glad, because you have a great reward in heaven. In the same way, people harassed the prophets who came before you.

Observation

Chapter 5 begins with the Beatitudes. This is an important message from Jesus on Christian life. While most of our translations read “blessed,” the Common English Bible (CEB) translates this as “happy.” Jesus means here that we experience a “transcendent happiness” which is rooted in Christ.

Application

When have you experienced “transcendent happiness” - that is, a deep sense of happiness or joy that is “soul-deep” and not dependent on surrounding circumstances?

Prayer

Dear God, you have entrusted me with your good news and promised to be with me always. Make me faithful to this charge, reaching out to all the world in words and deeds of love. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Tuesday, August 29

Scripture: Matthew 5:1-4 (New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition)

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he began to speak and taught them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Observation

What a strange contrast between these verses. Happy are those who are hopeless and grieve? At first glance, it might even feel offensive to name these most difficult times in life as “happy” or “blessed.” And yet, Jesus is introducing a new kind of kingdom, where the ways of our world are turned upside down.

Application

For many of us, when we look back on times of hopelessness or grief, we can see signs of God’s faithfulness to us. We can recount glimpses of hope and happiness, where someone showed us a particular kind of mercy or grace. Within these verses, Jesus is reminding us that feelings of grief and hopelessness are not the final word. Rather, Christ will be with us so that we can “be made glad” (v4). How might Christ be present to you today, “making you glad”? How might Christ be working through you for the gladness of others?

Prayer

Dear God, you have entrusted me with your good news and promised to be with me always. Make me faithful to this charge, reaching out to all the world in words and deeds of love. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Wednesday, August 30

Scripture: Matthew 5:5-9 (The Message)

“You’re blessed when you’re content with just who you are—no more, no less. That’s the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can’t be bought.

“You’re blessed when you’ve worked up a good appetite for God. He’s food and drink in the best meal you’ll ever eat.

“You’re blessed when you care. At the moment of being ‘care-full,’ you find yourselves cared for.

“You’re blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.

“You’re blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That’s when you

discover who you really are, and your place in God's family.

Observation

You might try reading this passage a few times this week, in various translations. Does one 'speak' to you in a certain way? Do you hear Christ encouraging you through words of another? Today we read Eugene Peterson's Message translation, which sounds to me a little more conversational. Rest in your seat, and imagine Jesus sitting across from you, speaking these words right to you.

"You're blessed when you're content with just who you are: no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourself a proud owner of everything that can't be bought. You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God... You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family." (portions, v5-9)"

Application

What did you hear from Jesus today? What stood out as something to bring your comfort? Words to challenge you? Beloved one, you are blessed by God. This is true when everything goes right, and when nothing seems to do so. You are blessed, because you have been created and redeemed by a God who loves you deeply.

Prayer

Dear God, you have entrusted me with your good news and promised to be with me always. Make me faithful to this charge, reaching out to all the world in words and deeds of love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Thursday, August 31

Scripture: Matthew 5:10-12 (The Message)

"You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom.

"Not only that—count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens—give a cheer, even!—for though they don't like it, *I* do! And all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble."

Observation

"Know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble" (v12). Sounds a bit like the "good trouble" that John Lewis spoke of, doesn't it? And of course, John's words were grounded in a belief that God has created all people with sacred worth, knowing that living a life committed to that would cause others to become angry or afraid. Jesus reminds us that we are blessed when we say and do the hard things. "Heaven applauds" us when we do.

Application

How might Jesus be inviting you to do, or say, the hard thing? This might be standing up for someone who is being harmed. It might be repenting of your own actions or thoughts that have harmed others. What might you do today that keeps you in "good company"? How might you look to ancestors of faith for encouragement when you feel nervous or afraid?

Prayer

Dear God, you have entrusted me with your good news and promised to be with me always. Make me faithful to this charge, reaching out to all the world in words and deeds of love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Friday, September 1

Scripture: Matthew 5:13-16 (Common English Bible)

“You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its saltiness, how will it become salty again? It’s good for nothing except to be thrown away and trampled under people’s feet. You are the light of the world. A city on top of a hill can’t be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they put it on top of a lampstand, and it shines on all who are in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before people, so they can see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven.”

Observation

My husband has been teaching my boys the secret behind grilling a good burger or steak. The secret? Salt, of course! Salt, like butter, is a “magic” ingredient that helps highlight and amplify the flavors within any dish.

Application

How are you living a life that is “salty” today? How is it that your prayers are amplifying the ministry of Jesus in our community and world? How might your words and actions, your gifts and passions, be ones that highlight and elevate the message of God’s love today?

Prayer

Dear God, you have entrusted me with your good news and promised to be with me always. Make me faithful to this charge, reaching out to all the world in words and deeds of love. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Saturday, September 2

Scripture: Matthew 28:18-20 (Common English Bible)

Jesus came near and spoke to them, “I’ve received all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I’ve commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age.”

Observation

We read our guiding verse for this series again. And now, I’m thinking about last words. What are the last words you say before hanging up a phone call? The last words you heard from a parent before they passed? The last words you said before your child took the car out for the first time? Last words have a big impact on our lives. These are the last words of Jesus, according to Matthew’s gospel.

Application

If this were the final thing you would hear from Christ about how to be a faithful follower of Jesus, how might that change you? Where do you sense Christ inviting you to serve? How do you notice confirmation of Jesus’ presence in your life today?

Prayer

Dear God, you have entrusted me with your good news and promised to be with me always. Make me faithful to this charge, reaching out to all the world in words and deeds of love. In Jesus’ name, Amen.