

King of Glory Lutheran Church: February 4-5, 2017

No Selective Hearing: Pour it Out and Turn it On!      Matthew 5:13-20

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*God has created us as salt and light for a weary darkened world. By being who God made us to be, we further God's Kingdom and create open spaces of honor and life.*

God bless you salty people! God bless you light-shiny people!  
What a blessing you are to God's world. Indeed. God's blessings to you this day!

You all know about selective hearing. Your children don't listen to your directions, but when you mention the possibility of a movie, that's all they can talk about. I suspect that there may be a bit of selective hearing later tonight during the game. Selective hearing.

Well I fear that we might have some selective hearing with Matthew's Gospel this morning. It's those sticky verses 19-20. 'Whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments will be called least.' And 'unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you'll never enter the kingdom of heaven.'

My fear is those words are the only ones you'll remember! Because I'm guessing what you may be thinking about those verses. "I'm not good enough! God is giving me just another command. I'll never measure up! My righteousness isn't better than the Jewish leaders'."

Let's pause and reflect just a minute. Most of us usually think about 'righteousness' as moral purity. In the Old Testament and Hebrew language, 'righteousness' is an idea of an expression of God. Salvation. Vindication. Divine aid. In the New Testament, the term has to do with proper relationship with God. Think about 'righteousness' as our alignment with God. How we are drawn into the reality of God's intentions and God's kingdom. It's how we sense what God might be about in the world and supporting those purposes.

The Laws and Pharisees have their own idea about what righteousness looks like. "But," Jesus is saying, "I'm inviting you to participate in what God is doing that even exceeds how the Pharisees see and understand it." Use your Jewish imagination. Superior righteous looks like what God's intentions and purposes are in the greatest fulfillment of the Law. The Law was designed by God to bring life, care of neighbor, love of God. Thus Jesus is inviting us to dream big! Right now our dream is too small. Jesus is pro-Torah. He isn't against the Law. It's more that our dream of what God can do is too small. (Matt Skinner, NT Prof. Luther Seminary) Jesus is calling us to dream bigger and better than the church establishment about how life can be when we love God and neighbor. Hear that difference.

When Rev. Ron Gluskamp became the director of the Always Being Made New Campaign for our national church the ELCA, he began a five year comprehensive campaign to raise \$198 million for new and expanded church wide ministries around the world. Most of us might think that raising \$198 million would be difficult. Yet Rev. Gluskamp asked Presiding Bishop Eaton, "What will you do with the money we raise beyond the \$198 million?" That's dreaming big. That's leaning into God's calling to be righteous and bringing the Kingdom in.

Now, selective hearing out of the way, hear this. "You are salt. You are light." I am salt. I am light. These pronouncements are gifts from God's hand. Jesus doesn't say, 'try to be salt' or 'you could be light.' No. He says, 'You are already salt. You are already light!' Try hearing yourself say it out loud. "I am salt!" "I am light!"

You may not think these categories important, but they are! Salt by its very chemical make-up changes things. Throw it on the ice and water melts. Put it on food and it enhances flavor. Salt in ancient days was a precious commodity. It preserved food. It was used as money. Cities were built around salt mines. As for light? It too illuminates and brightens by its very make-up. Humans have always needed light. Whether it was a fire for cooking or the single bulb hanging in the middle of the room, as

long as we had the possibility of channeling light to ward off darkness, we have.

Jesus is using these designations so that people know how they can participate in God's kingdom! Be salt – preserve love! Be light – shine grace and kindness. Pour it out! Turn it on!

Jesus isn't giving us another expectation to live up to. He is saying we are light. We are salt. By being who God created us to be, we are conduits of God's working out Kingdom dreams!

Maya Angelou said it like this. "Nothing can dim the light which shines within." Marianne Williamson put it differently in her poem, "Our Deepest Fear."

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our Light, not our Darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be?

You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the World. (There is nothing enlightening about shrinking so that other people won't feel unsure around you.) We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us.

(It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone.) As we let our own Light shine, we consciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

(<http://storage.cloversites.com/fellowshipchurch2/documents/poem%20-%20Our%20Deepest%20Fear.pdf>)

Think back with me over the week. There were clashes on UC Berkeley's campus. A ban on travel has moved state legislatures and individuals to speak out. Our nation's relations with other foreign countries are changing. There are questions about who should be in and who should be out.

Now listen to Matthew's social context. We know that the Jews Matthew was writing to were under discord. It was a community

divided. Whatever the conflict, Matthew himself is very worried about who is in and who is out. In future Matthew texts, we'll hear about wheat and weeds growing together. Who are the sheep and who are the goats? This community was navigating social dividing lines. Sound familiar?

Jesus said to His people back then, 'you are salt, you are light' implying a call for them to be a palpable presence in the community. And if our context is perhaps just as divided, then surely isn't it time we are salt and light as well?

So what does being salt and light look like? If righteousness is living into God's purposes for the Kingdom, loving God and loving neighbor, then being salty is allowing God's light to shine through you to make a difference in this world.

Volunteering at a local school reading to children! Salty! Driving seniors to doctor's appointments. Shiny! Making a meal for your family. Writing a sympathy card. Paying the bills on time so that your house is in good order. Saying I love you.

If your political leanings take you one way or another, lean into that. Write a letter. Make a phone call. Participate! If your salt shaker has been on the shelf lately and you have been hiding your light now is the time. Pour it out! Turn it on!

When we do nothing our salt loses taste and our light is hid under a basket. Don't do that! Now is the time to be salt and light.

And I want to ask you another question. What if we vowed to and with one another – that in this space we would not have selective hearing? What if we covered this congregation in prayer that we might model a community that can speak; agree, disagree and still love one another in Christian love? I'm not talking about comfortable conversations about the weather or our grandchildren's latest soccer game. I'm talking about learning how to dialog with one another so that all will be blessed by the conversation. Selective hearing aside; how can we be curious about other's positions so that we don't discard a person along with their opinions? That's the challenging piece.

My first congregation had a rule that we wouldn't ever talk politics. Church was a safe space because we were located straight across the street from the state capitol and so many members worked for the state government. My second congregation was very large and had the whole spectrum of people's opinions on every issue. Therefore we navigated politics and hot topics carefully. My sense of you, is that you want and may need something more. I'm inviting you to talk to me and let me know what you need spiritually right now. Whatever your politics, what do you need faith wise? How can we as the people of God be salt and light to one another given the season we are in?

The Good News is that the New Testament is filled with churches in rich conversation about challenging topics. So we'll be in good company.

Now one more time, let me hear you say it. I am salt! I am light! I have Jesus call to participate in the kingdom! I will dream big! I will not hide! I am blessed! Pour it out! Turn it on!

Lord God, I ask a blessing on your people. Allow them to live into their identity as salty and shiny people! As they live, work and play, may their saltiness and light further your kingdom on earth. Amen.