

Daily Discipleship

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany (A) – Matthew 5:13-20

Discipleship: *Following the One Who Commissions*

Focus Question: *What does it mean for Jesus to commission you to be salt of the earth and light of the world?*

word of life

“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.” Matthew 5:16 (NRSV)

Read Matthew 5:13-20

The Sermon of the Mount in Matthew 5 begins with Jesus offering a series of blessings followed by a commissioning. Jesus leaves no ambiguity for his followers. Jesus commissions them by stating, “You are the salt of the earth. . . . You are the light of the world.”

1. *What does this commissioning mean to you?*
2. *Why was Jesus so direct with his words?*

As a master teacher, Jesus uses common elements of his day, salt and light, to illustrate his point.

In Biblical times, salt was used to preserve food which might otherwise rot and decay in the heat of the day. As a preservative, salt extended the length of time for food to be edible. Salt was a valuable commodity in part because of its quality of permanence. Pure salt does not lose its taste over time. Salt remains salt. It is a needed element for a human body to live.

God so loved the world that Christ was sent to live with impure humanity, to walk with those unworthy, to eat with sinners, and to bring life. Jesus commissions his followers to do the same. You are salt. Be present in a confused and dying world. Extend life in Christ. Make a difference.

3. *What does it mean to be salt of the earth?*

Jesus also proclaims his followers to be light of the world. There is no crash course for becoming light. There is no manual to read. It is by the grace of God a follower of Jesus shines. Jesus offers encouragement to his disciples, “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.” (Matthew 5:16 NRSV) Let God’s light shine through you. Let God light your candle.

4. *What does it feel like when God’s light shines through you?*
5. *When or why might someone try to hide the light of Christ?*
6. *Do disciples seem to have a choice in being salt and light? Why or why not?*

It is by God’s grace a Christian community is lit like a city on a hill at night or flavored like salt in food. Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes in The Cost of Discipleship, “The followers are a visible community; their discipleship visible in action which lifts them out of the world—otherwise it would not be discipleship. And of course the following is as visible to the world as light in the darkness or a mountain rising from a plain.” (New York: The Macmillan Company, 6th printing, 1965, pg. 132)

7. *What does it mean to be part of the visible community of Christ?*
8. *What are examples of visible actions by disciples?*

The message and mission of Jesus is not to be lost. We are to tell his story again and again, from one generation to the next.

word among us

Imagine Jesus teaching the crowd on the mountainside. Imagine the crowd listening to his every word. It is one thing for Jesus to offer the blessing of the beatitudes, but he also commissions his followers as salt of the earth and light of the world. Imagine the crowd looking at each other with wonderment. Just who is Jesus commissioning? Could it be me or you?

1. *What does it mean for you to be commissioned by Jesus to be salt of the earth?*
2. *What does it mean for you to be commissioned by Jesus to be the light of the world?*

There is no doubt Jesus expects his words and teachings to impact people in such a way that there is a permanent transformation. If salt does not have the qualities of salt, then it is no longer salt. Likewise, light is no longer light if it does not illumine.

A Christian is connected directly to Christ. Otherwise he or she is not a Christian. It would be impossible. Dietrich Bonhoeffer refers to this as being part of the visible community.

3. *How do you feel about the directness of the words of Jesus?*
4. *What are the implications of the words of Jesus for daily life?*
5. *How do you respond to the expectation that you are a visible witness to Christ?*

Without a doubt Jesus expects his followers to impact others. As a master teacher, Jesus provides two different images for his audience to grasp. Although the examples given by Jesus are contrasting, he makes a consistent point. Jesus commissions his disciples to be a tangible extension of Christ in the world.

When salt is added to food, it typically disappears. That is until the salted food is tasted. Then, the salt is evident. There is no doubt salt is present. Some people prefer to be like salt, serving behind the scenes. These salty followers of Christ make an impact through their quiet means.

6. *Who has been salt in your own life?*
7. *We can be salt as individuals or as a community. What are the advantages and disadvantages of both opportunities?*

Other disciples of Jesus resonate with being light. Their impact is immediately detected. When the electricity goes off at night, people scramble for a candle or flashlight. What a relief and comfort when light is provided. The impact is immediate.

8. *Who has been light in your own life?*
9. *Do you relate more to being salt of the earth or light of the world? How so?*
10. *How might you be more effective at being salt or light?*
11. *Who in your life might be blessed from you being salt of the earth and light of the world?*

Prayer

Jesus, you call and commission us to be the salt of the earth and light of the world. We can be neither without you. Empower us to be your visible community in the world. Amen

Dig Deeper

Isaiah 58:5-9a

last word

This week
be the
salt of the earth and
light of the world.



Daily Discipleship

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