

Sunday, September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2008  
The 23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

Matthew 5:12-16, Matthew 25:31-46  
A Light to the World

Perhaps the primary complaint against the Christian church is that we don't manage to walk the walk as well as we talk the talk. A faith that proclaims that Jesus loves the little children of the world, red and yellow, black and white, and that has been complicit in racism, slavery, and apartheid, historically, while making contemporary statements about AIDS/HIV and immigration is certainly a fair target for that criticism.

Current arguments include the role of women in the church, questions of sexuality, the morality of abortion and international economics and politics in America. And we don't want to talk about it. These conversations make us uncomfortable. These conversations risk the creation of rifts between people who otherwise get along. And yet, it is these conversations and this work to which Christ constantly calls us.

Jesus looks at the disciples, he looks at us, and he asks us to be salt for the world. And in modern terms we think of salt as a spice. We think of salt in terms of small quantities because anything else is bad for our hearts. We try to dodge salt – at least when other people are watching – until we add some extra salt 'to taste.'

But this isn't the kind of salt Jesus meant. In his day, salt was used as more than a flavoring and a threat to the heart. Salt was a preservative. Salt was a purifier and a cleansing agent. Salt was used as money – it did not sell for \$0.69 for 26 ounces. Salt was used in large quantities and was rare.

And salt was absolutely necessary for life. And this is the point of the passage. We are called to be absolutely essential for life – for our own lives, for the lives of our neighbors and the lives of our world.

And if we aren't essential, then Jesus will throw us aside and grind us under the feet of his sandals. Jesus loves the little children, but he doesn't have a whole lot of patience for those who say they follow him and don't live it out. He asks us not to hide our light under a bushel, but we still do. We still shy away from the work that we are called to do.

Hence his rather terse comments to the crowd later on in Matthew. He speaks to a crowd about how things will end. And Jesus presents two scenarios – one for the faithful who will be rewarded and one for the less than faithful. Something for the sheep and something for the goats, if you will.

But I want you to hear quite carefully that Jesus speaks the same thing to both groups. They provide the same response – when did we see you like that? And the answer is the same to both groups. When you did it to the least of these, you did it to me.

This is being salt. This is being essential for the life of the world. This is letting out light shine into the world. It is taking initiative and responding

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without specific direction to the situations at hand. The command from Jesus is to go and be – to go and do.

For the world to be transformed, for our lives to be transformed, for our church to be transformed, for our communities to be transformed, we have to go forth and be salt. We can't live our lives by avoiding salt. We have to show the light of Christ. We have to go forth unafraid to be salt and light, to have hard conversations and to be willing to sacrifice for what Christ asks us to do and be.

And some days that work is salt in the open wounds of our lives. And other days, we are the only light someone who is living in darkness ever sees. And the light can be blinding. But if we are called to show the kingdom of God to the world, we have to run the risk. If this is our call, then we have to battle our own fears and hopes, that God's hopes may be realized. If we are the church, then we have no choice.