

“Shine”

Isaiah 58:1-12 & Matthew 5:13-16

Pastor James York

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Two weeks ago, we listened to the beginning of Jesus' *Sermon on the Mount*. The beatitudes in some seasons of our life encourage us to do and be more, to actively partner with God in transforming our lives. We are to strive to be poor in spirit giving God control of everything. We are to mourn over the wrongs, sufferings, and injustices of the world to move us to active compassion. We are to hunger and thirst for righteousness actively serving to provide food, clothing, housing, health care, freedom, education, and meaningful employment for all. We are to strive to be merciful, compassionately forgiving everyone and being gracious to all. We are to be pure in heart being honest, loving God, loving all people and loving self. We are to be peacemakers who reconcile relationships and build relationships with all people excluding no one, welcoming everyone. God's kingdom is worth risking everything.

There are seasons when the blessings are healings, freely given to us by God. The blessings perfect us and make us complete. We are assured of God's presence, comforted, given the kingdom of heaven, filled with the bread of life, given living water, forgiven, enabled to perceive God and God assures us that we are God's beloved cherished children. God, and all of heaven, cheer for us when we love.

Today we continue the sermon on the mount. **Matthew 5:13-16 NRSV** “**You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled underfoot. “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. 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.”**

Jesus continues the tension of already and not yet. We are the salt of the earth and we are not yet fully salty. There are seasons where God graciously gives us our saltiness and there are seasons when God calls us to partner with God in becoming saltier.

Jesus initial audience highly valued salt for its many uses. Salt was used as a preservative, to disinfect wounds, make pottery, to flavor food and as currency. Roman workers were often paid with salt. This is where the saying “worth their salt” originated. If you are competent and deserve your earnings you are “worth your salt”. A salt payment is a salarium from which comes our English word salary. Salt was used in worship.

We are like salt. We have the love to be a blessing in numerous ways. We preserve the truth, love and joy which are eternal. We flavor others, inspire others with our goodness and serving. We make, by building people up with affirmations and encouragement. We disinfect by assuring one another of God's grace that forgives and heals. Our worth comes from God. We are called to help everyone realize their worth as God's beloved. We worship by giving our time, talents, and money to God.

Jesus often used images of enormous growth, a mustard seed, a pinch of yeast, a sprinkle of salt. God makes a little go a long way. God is ever creating an expanding cosmos. God is growing each of us.

On earth none of us stays salty. We resalinate by striving to be and do all the points Jesus taught in the beatitudes. We resalinate by being healed, perfected, and made whole by God.

The prophet Isaiah proclaims how we can actively become saltier. **Isaiah 58:1-12 NLT** “**Shout with the voice of a trumpet blast. Shout aloud! Don't be timid.**

Tell my people Israel of their sins! Yet they act so pious! They come to the Temple every day and seem delighted to learn all about me. They act like a righteous nation that would never abandon the laws of its God. They ask me to take action on their behalf, pretending they want to be near me. ‘We have fasted before you!’ they say. ‘Why aren't you impressed? We have been very hard on ourselves, and you don't even notice it!’ ‘I will tell you why!’ I respond. “It's because you are fasting to please yourselves. Even while you fast, you keep oppressing your workers. What good is fasting when you keep on fighting and quarreling? This kind of fasting will never get you anywhere with me. You humble yourselves by going through the motions of penance, bowing your heads like reeds bending in the wind. You dress in burlap and cover yourselves with ashes. Is this what you call fasting? Do you really think this will please the Lord? “No, this is the kind of fasting I want: Free those who are wrongly imprisoned; lighten the burden of those who work for you.

Let the oppressed go free, and remove the chains that bind people. Share your food with the hungry, and give shelter to the homeless. Give clothes to those who need them, and do not hide from relatives who need your help. “Then your salvation will come like the dawn, and your wounds will quickly heal. Your godliness will lead you forward, and the glory of the Lord will protect you from behind. Then when you call, the Lord will answer. ‘Yes, I am here,’ he will quickly reply. “Remove the heavy yoke of oppression. Stop pointing your finger and spreading vicious rumors! Feed the hungry, and help those in trouble. Then your light will shine out from the darkness, and the darkness around you will be as bright as noon. The Lord will guide you continually, giving you water when you are dry and restoring your strength. You will be like a well-watered garden, like an ever-flowing spring. Some of you will rebuild the deserted ruins of your cities. Then you will be known as a rebuilder of walls and a restorer of homes.”

Fasting conditions us to be oriented to God and oriented to the needs of others. During fasting we empty ourselves and give to satisfy the needs of others. During fasting whenever we long for what we are fasting from, we are to be grateful for all God provides.

There are numerous things we can fast from. We can fast from food and give the money we would have spent on food to the food shelf and the time we would have spent eating by serving a meal at a homeless shelter. We can fast from social media and visit a homebound member. We can fast from reading for pleasure and read to our children during junior church. We can fast from alcohol and tutor a youth. We can fast from TV and write cards of gratitude for those who serve us. We can fast from carbon, turn down the heat, take the bus, drink from a refillable water bottle, to help care for the environment. We can fast from talking for awhile and compassionately listen. We can fast from entertainment and help our neighbor. We can fast from a vacation and volunteer for Habitat for Humanity. We can fast from staying up late and bring a coworker breakfast. We can fast from the internet and call friends and family. Fasting is pausing our wants to serve others and worship God.

This kind of fasting is helping others break free from the “yoke” of oppression and frees us as well. In a consumer culture, we tend to become prisoners of those things that we consume, be it food, material things or entertainment. They exert a certain hold over us, causing us to believe that we couldn’t possibly go without them for any length of time. The truth, however, is that when we hold things loosely, when we are more generous with our food, our hospitality and our time, we tend to feel ourselves liberated as well. As God says through Isaiah, “If you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. The Lord will guide you continually and satisfy your needs in parched places”. Fasting, in other words, is a path toward freedom, not only for others but for ourselves. It is a means of healing and a way of reminding us that God is the One who is with us and supplies all that we need.

Merely abstaining from something is not a fast. True fasting results in transformation, a change in one’s intentions. Repentance is not feeling bad, rather repentance is intention, a state of mind, that causes results. True fasting and repentance yields energy to love and serve bringing heaven to earth. True fasting and repentance resalicates us. You are the salt of the earth.

You are the light of the world. Jesus urges us to serve as lamps for each other. All of us are on a journey to abundant life. Jesus calls us to shine our light onto the paths of others to help them avoid the obstacles and pitfalls of life and guide them to complete peace, joy and love.

There was a time when lamps had to be lit every evening by a lamplighter. One could sit on a hill and see everywhere the lamplighter went and every lamp that they set ablaze. Likewise, our lives leave a path of light, of love, of joy, for others to follow and enjoy.

Jesus shines on us so we can see ourselves in the Kingdom of God. We shine on others so we all can see that all of us will be in heaven.

Being salt and light is exponentially multiplied when we gather together. One cold day a police officer brought a trembling man before the judge charging him with stealing a loaf of bread. His family, he said, was starving. “I must punish you.” Declared the judge. The law makes no exceptions. I must sentence you to a fine of ten dollars. At the same time the judge reached into her purse, took out ten dollars and gave it to the man. “Furthermore,” declared the judge, “I am fining everyone in this courthouse a dollar for living in a town where a person has to steal bread for their family to eat. Bailiff collect the fines and give the money to the defendant!” When we lovingly serve together our light is intensified and we become a well-lit city on a hill for the world to see.

Desmond Tutu said. “God has set in motion a centripetal process, a moving toward the center, toward unity, harmony, goodness, peace and justice, a process that removes barriers.” We are all on a journey home to the light. Amen

