

SERMON: Bright and Flavorful

TEXT: Matthew 5:13-20

It was a hot and rainy August night in Tennessee, as I drove from Cedars of Lebanon State Park back to Spring Hill, after officiating at my friend's wedding. Lebanon is east of Nashville, in a much less densely populated area, but the road back was Interstate 40, so it was at least 4 lanes all the way. And it sure didn't seem like the Interstate. It. Was. Dark. The entire way. Forty-five minutes to an hour of driving on a dark, rain soaked highway. And to make matters worse, I was going to have to stop for gas. (The story of that experience will have to wait for another time!)

I kept thinking that any moment now I would see the glow of the city lights as I got closer to civilization, but I continued to be disappointed. Earlier, on the way to the park, in the light of day, I didn't notice how lonely this road was. More than once I rehearsed aloud a conversation I'd like to have with the Tennessee Department of Transportation. "Hey, Tennessee, how about some lights on the highways? Or, am I not supposed to be out after dark?" (Sarcasm reigns supreme in all the conversations that take place in my head.) "If I lived in Tennessee, I'd be willing to pay state taxes if it would buy some lights for the roads."

Perhaps I'm overreacting, and what I really need is a trip to the eye doctor to talk about night blindness. But once I unclenched my fists after arriving back at my friend's house, I felt no guilt whatsoever in filling my face with the leftover wedding cake that was foolishly placed in my care.

Jesus, whom we know as the Light of the World, taught his disciples, "*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."

You ARE the light of the world. Not, *you're supposed to be*. Not, *you will be*. But, you ARE. I think Jesus is telling the disciples that people are watching them. Or, if they're not watching now, they will be watching so much more closely after Jesus is gone.

There are crowds of people there on the hillside, listening to Jesus teach. Sometimes his words are for the whole crowd, and other times, just for the disciples. Nevertheless, the crowd hears, and they will watch to see if the ones

closest to Jesus are doing what he says. Living what he preaches. Imitating what he does.

A city built on a hill cannot be hid. That's why it's on a hill in the first place. So that it will be seen. Any light that is hidden defeats the very purpose of light. Neither our faith nor our works ought to be hidden.

However, this does not mean that the spotlight should be shining on us. Our light should guide others. Not to ourselves. Not even to our church. Our light should guide others to Jesus. You are the light of the world, not because of who you are, but because of how your light illumines the way, the works, the words, and the person of Jesus. "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." It's not about us. It's about what we are doing to point others to Jesus. It's about what we are doing to shine the spotlight on God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

At least once a week, for most of my life, somebody at the dinner table would say, "please pass the salt." And someone else at the table - usually the cook

and/or a parental figure - would question, "Have you tasted it yet?" Most often, the answer was, "no," but it was too late. There was a whole lotta shakin goin on!

We crave salt. Because we need salt. Unfortunately, most of us in our society get too much salt, resulting in high blood pressure, swelling, and dehydration. But if you're not getting enough salt, you will feel weak and tired.

Salt brings out the flavor of food, enhances it, enriches it. Salt is also a preservative and a purifying agent. In Biblical times, salt was added to offerings brought to the altar. Salt was a symbol of covenant for the Jewish people, indicating permanence and security.

When we describe someone as being the "salt of the earth," what we mean is that the person demonstrates the best and most noble characteristics, such as honesty, integrity, kindness, generosity, patience, and humility.

There's an article in this weekend's newspaper - you may have seen it, too, about the principal of Jefferson Elementary School here in Cape Girardeau. Often donning a sequined blazer, Leigh Ragsdale seems not as much salt-of-the-earth as

she is just plain salty. She has created a culture among the largely at-risk student body, emphasizing kind words and kind actions. She begins each day by letting them know that they are safe and they are loved, greeting them by name and sometimes with a hug. It sounds all warm and fuzzy, but she also has high expectations for their behavior and creative means of discipline. She changes into Army fatigues, becoming *General Ragsdale*, who lays down the law. In just a year and a half, referrals to the office for misbehavior have gone down, from 138 in the first semester of 2018 to fewer than 20 so far this year.

We need someone like her to work with those in the highest levels of the United States government to create a culture of kind words and kind actions!

It can be tempting, in this world we're living in right now, to turn off the lights and go to bed. To forget about trying to be the salt-of-the-earth because it doesn't get you anywhere. Nobody gets rewarded for good character anymore, and those who hide their deeds in the dark also steal the spotlight for themselves, so why should we bother trying to be salt and light?

Well, because Jesus defined us as such and calls us to it. “You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.... Let your light shine before others, so that they will see your *good works* and give glory to your Father in heaven.... whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

The world needs more salt and light. More kind words and kind actions. The world needs disciples and churches to give God the glory. To demonstrate the kingdom of God. To shine the light on Jesus. The world needs us to be BRIGHT AND FLAVORFUL in living our faith.

Let your light shine before others... to the glory of God!

AMEN.