

Making a Difference

Matthew 5: 13-16

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Already in God's Presence: Theologian Richard Rohr said that we cannot attain the presence of God because we're already in the presence of God. What's absent is awareness. Little do we realize that God's love is maintaining us in existence with every breath we draw. Rohr goes on to say that human culture keeps us blinded to God's presence. The more we are aware of God's presence in the mundane/the everyday of our lives, the more prepared we are to reflect that presence to others.

Being Present for others: Jesus wants us to reflect him by "being there" for other people.

Newsweek ran an article some time ago about street gangs. In it they told the story of a Pentecostal preacher who was trying to reach out to the slum dwellers for Christ. The preacher sought out a local drug dealer (to ask him why he was so successful in dragging people into his lifestyle)... and he gave the Pentecostal preacher, a lesson in why God was losing to gangs in the battle for the souls of inner city kids. The dealer who was called 'Selvin' explained to us, 'I'm there when Johnny goes out for a loaf of bread for Mama. I'm there, you're not. I win, you lose. It's all about being there.'

Being present in ministry is also vital inside the congregation: For example, to name a few of these ministries: helping with the coffee ministry, the nursery ministry; regularly being there in worship for others who get comfort from your presence; taking time to be present by starting conversations, introducing yourself, pastoral visiting.....the list of ministries goes on!

Being Like Jesus: The great Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi, was most intrigued by Jesus Christ and was seriously considering becoming a Christian. However, while studying law in South Africa, he being very interested in the Christian faith and decided to attend a church service one Sunday morning. When arriving at the church, a racial slur was directed at him and he was told he could not enter the church. From that moment, Gandhi said, he decided to adopt what good he found in Christianity, but would never again consider becoming a Christian if it meant being part of the church. He said that the church looked merely like another segregating caste system. He was not interested in that.

The Ministry of Welcome is obviously a huge factor! We have the best news ever! But Christians have so often failed to show that the Good news of Jesus Christ has made a difference in their daily lives.

When the missionary E. Stanley Jones met with Gandhi he asked him, "Mr. Gandhi, though you quote the words of Christ often, why is that you appear to so adamantly reject becoming his follower?" Gandhi replied, "Oh, I don't reject Christ. I love Christ. It's just that so many of you Christians are so unlike Christ." "If Christians would really live according to the teachings of Christ, as found in the Bible, all of India would be Christian today," he added.

Put simply, the church as Gandhi saw it was not in line with Christ. Christ was relevant to Gandhi, but the church was not reflecting Christ. There are many reasons why this is so, but one reason stands out above the rest: The church has lost its relevance and authenticity because Christians have too often neglected their responsibility to be salt and light in the world. One of the temptations among Christians is to focus only on salvation – the gift of eternal life with minimal focus on advancing the Kingdom of God in the mundane of their daily lives.

You are salt!

"You are the salt of the earth" is such a famous statement that it has become a proverb in English. If one is kind, generous, and non-judgmental, we say they are a "salt of the earth" type of person.

What did Jesus mean? Salt was one of the most common substances at the time of Jesus. Roman soldiers were paid in salt and would revolt if they didn't get their ration. Actually, our English word "salary" comes from the Latin word 'salarium', which literally means "salt-money." And our expression, "That man is not worth his salt," is a reminder of the high value that salt had in those ancient times. As made clear in this metaphor, Jesus values us very highly!

What are the uses of salt?

Salt is a flavoring: Christians are to show joy of the good news of Jesus Christ. Non-believers are to see that Christians make visible the good in the world – like salt can bring out and accentuate the flavours in food.

Salt is a preservative: Christians are stewards of God's creation. We are to take care of it! Love for our neighbor also preserves relationships and helps keep our various relationships strong.

Salt is an antiseptic.

In biblical times newborn babies were rubbed in salt so that the cuts and infections of medically primitive birth methods could be healed. While this was painful, the cleaning out of a wound with salt was very effective in fighting infection.

Christians are called to be healers as Christ was the great physician. Christians have a responsibility of practically offering healing and help for those who need it.

Salt leads to thirst.

You know the saying, "you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink". But, one could continue by saying, "you can give him a salt tablet and making him thirsty". As Jesus loved people and then they became thirsty for God the Father, so Christians are to love others drawing them to thirst for the real life found only in Christ.

You are Light!

Jesus not only says that we are the salt of the earth, he also says we are the light of the world. Jesus says, 'You are the Light of the World' (Matthew 5: 14).

Light Dispel the darkness. Any kind of light will dispel darkness. One small candle in a dark house completely changes the atmosphere. Darkness is dispelled! As imitators of Christ, even our small light brings a flicker of light (or a flicker of hope) to a dark situation.

Light Reveals. Have you ever walked into a darkened room and not known what was there? Then, suddenly, the light is switched on and the contents of the room are revealed.

As Christ's presence in our world, we become his instruments to reveal God's grace and peace in a world of fear and conflict.

Light wakes up. As imitators of Christ we are to awaken society to the presence of Christ. Light gives warning.

In the same sense that a lighthouse warns of being too close to dangerous rocky shores, Christians are called by Christ to warn the world of dangerous behavior which puts individuals and nations at odds. Imitators of Christ lead by example, guiding others to wise choices.

It's Your Move in 2016!

In order to live out our identity as Salt and Light, it is important to pray and stay in close contact with Christ, our loving Saviour. I was reading about a pastor who bought one of those glow in the dark figures for his daughter. The figurine stayed in the box until he returned home that night. When the pastor gave it to his daughter and told her what it was she was so excited. She tore open the box to reveal her gift. But it did not glow. She was sad. "What's wrong, Daddy?" she asked. The answer was revealed on the label attached to the figurine: If you want me to shine in the night, keep me in the light.

Gandhi did not see Christians glowing. He did not see them seasoning the world to bring out Christ and making a difference. We can get so wrapped up in the lures of our culture that the presence of Christ is dulled in our senses and diminishing our ability to be a bright presence to others. Unlike what Gandhi experienced in South Africa, Oakridge congregation is a welcoming congregation. Let's continue to use this identity we have as a springboard to outdo one another in being salt and a bright light for this planet.

We aren't called to save the world this year. However, individually and collaboratively we are called to make a difference in the name of Jesus. Do others see Jesus love glowing in you? Amen.

