

2-4-24

Sermon- Engaging the Community

Scripture- Matthew 5:13-20, CTW PS 112:1-9

Hymns- 352, 519, 779

Theme- What is an Externally Focused Church? It is defined as "A church that is convinced that their effectiveness is not measured by what happens inside the church but rather by the impact the people of the church have on the community. They are engaging their community with truth and grace, good news and good deeds."

Introduction

The question the church needs to answer today is not how many people are in the pews, but how many of its members are making a difference in the community.

I. There are three essentials to being an Externally Focused Church...

- A. Are We Salt of the Earth People?
- B. Do we Shine the Light of God?
- C. Do We Reflect the Light Into the Community and Beyond?

The Proposition here is that: "An externally focused church makes a difference in the community through good works and living out the Gospel in their daily lives."

Let's pull Jesus' message apart:

I. The Externally Focused Church Is Salty (13).

- A. "Salt Of The Earth" what does that mean to you?**

Does anyone remember the sitcom Different Strokes? It's the story of two brothers adopted by a wealthy man. The younger of the two brothers would look at his brother and say, "What you talking about Willis?"

You have to wonder if Jesus' disciples ever looked at him and said, "What in the world are you talking about Jesus?"

Just after talking about the Beatitudes, Jesus says to them, "You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless."

Various scholars have emphasized different uses of salt in antiquity, such as a preservative or an agent regularly added to manure; but the use of salt here is as a flavoring agent: "if salt has become tasteless".

Here Jesus was speaking of the status of His disciples and their impact on the world.

His followers are to be the "seasoning" and "preservative" force of the world; i.e., in a sense they protect mankind from that which is "tasteless" (and hence no good) or decayed (and hence to be thrown away).

B. The phrase "if the salt have lost his savor" (literally, "become foolish"; that is, tasteless, bland) seems strange to us, since pure salt cannot lose its taste.

However, here "salt" is referring to Dead Sea salt obtained by merely evaporating some of its water. The resultant salt was impure and with time would become nothing but a worthless, unusable residue.

Leviticus 2:13 called for Old Testament sacrifices to be seasoned with salt. The salt was mixed in, not merely as a flavor and preservative, but as a symbol of the strength and

truthfulness of the people's self-surrender as they declared their loyalty, dependence on God, and willingness to serve Him.

C. The savor of saltiness that Jesus had in mind is the blessedness of strong spiritual desires, sorrow over sin, unassuming gentleness, desire for righteousness, cheerful compassion, heart purity, and the promotion of peace with God—**the very things He had just mentioned in the Beatitudes!**

Jesus also showed that believers are salt when they take up their cross in full dedication to the Lord, putting Him above all else.

If a seasoning has no flavor, it has no value. If Christians make no effort to affect the world around them, they are of little value to God.

If we are too much like the world, we are worthless. Christians should not blend in with everyone else. Instead, we should affect others positively, just as seasoning brings out the best flavor in food.

D. So I ask again, Are We Salty?

The church is the salt of the earth, but we do no good if we stay in the saltshaker. In the church. NOBODY LIKES SALT IN THE SHAKER BUT ALMOST EVERYONE LIKES SALT THAT IS SHAKEN, sprinkled into their life at just the right amount to bring the right flavor to the moment.

So you must decide what you will do to increase your "saltiness" - to become more distinctively Christlike in your values and actions?

Acts 1:8 states: But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

God fills us with his Holy Spirit so that we can make a difference in the world. We shouldn't be influenced by the world, the world should be influenced by us.

The Lord wants us to make a difference where we live, with our friends and neighbors. The Lord wants us to make a difference in our community, with our schools, first responders, and those in need.

The Lord wants us to make a difference in our State. The Lord wants us to make a difference around the world. He calls us to go out and do!

II. The Externally Focused Church Shines God's Light (14-15).

A. Are You The Light?

In the Canadian province of New Brunswick there is a church building on Deer Island that for many years has served as a physical light house to the fishermen of that community. It is not that the building has any unique architectural design that would resemble a nautical lighthouse. In fact, it resembles the style of many church buildings built a century ago.

It is the location of the building that makes it ideal as a lighthouse. The Worship House for the Church of Christ in Lord's Cove is elevated a few hundred feet higher than the Cove below.

For many years the fishermen returning to port could see the steeple of that Church building for miles from the water. In days before electronic equipment to guide them home the fishermen would aim for the Church building when returning to port.

From miles away, the men would aim for the church, or the light in its steeple. That course of direction would guide them past all the ledges and shoals, and safely back to the home port.

Here in verse 14, Jesus said, **"You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden."**

Believers are to be "the light of the world." It was prophesied that in addition to the Messiah, who was to be a light for the Gentiles, Israel and the children of Jerusalem would also be a light to the peoples.

B. Light is a symbol of salvation and life; moreover, like salt, it is indispensable (verse 13).

Jesus compared believers to light because they are the only ones who can show the world the way of salvation and demonstrate what God can do in a transformed life.

Christian character, expressed in the Beatitudes, is to be like a city set on a hill, easily seen. It is impossible for believers to avoid the scrutiny of those about them (Horton, 81).

Where there is light people can find their way and everything is clear; where there is darkness they stumble and are lost; this imagery is strongly developed especially in John's Gospel, where it is Jesus himself who is "the light of the world."

The world needs the light, and it is through the disciples that it must be made visible.

C. Then in v. 15, Jesus says, "No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house."

Jesus brought further emphasis to the same truth by comparing Christians to lamps. When a neighbor knocked at the door of the one- or two-room home of an ordinary Israelite, the occupant might put a grain measure about the size of a 2-gallon bucket over a pile of trash in the corner to hide it.

But no one would light a lamp to hide it.

The small wicker oil lamps of this period gave little light in the average home, which had few windows; they would be most effective by being set on a lampstand. Something large placed over them would presumably extinguish the light altogether.

God gives the light of life so that believers can give an effective witness and help to others.

While the idea of putting a bowl over a lamp seems crazy since it would soon go out for lack of oxygen, the point that Jesus is making is that the notion is absurd since the lamp's sole purpose is to provide light...

The context here implies that it is about the effect that the life of the disciples must have on those around them. It indicates that our job description is not fulfilled by private personal holiness, but indicates the witness we are to have on our community.

4. Can you hide a city that is sitting on top of a mountain? Its light at night can be seen for miles. If we live for Christ, we will glow like lights, showing others what Christ is like. We hide our light by

- A. being quiet when we should speak,
- B. going along with the crowd,
- C. denying the light,
- D. letting sin dim our light,
- E. not explaining our light to others, or
- F. ignoring the needs of others.

III. The Externally Focused Church Is Reflective (v16).

1. Let Your Good Deeds Shine

Now that Jesus has established the concept of letting or light shine, he now gives us a practical way to do that. In v. 16, Jesus says, "In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father."

The disciple must allow his or her light to shine through good works.

The triumph of the kingdom of God must be visible in the lives of its disciples.

"Glorify your Father" denotes the purpose of living properly before others (cf. 6:1), so that by observing how believers conduct themselves, others will come to understand what God is like and be drawn to Him. This brings glory to Him.

Our goal of our witness is not for others to emulate our way of life, or applaud our integrity, but that they recognize the source of our distinctive lifestyle in "Our Heavenly Father".

2. **Jesus made it clear that there would be no mistaking the source of a believer's good works.** The believer's light shines not for himself but to reflect the light back to the Father and so direct people to him.

The Disciple Must Be Created In Christ Jesus. A Christian should always remember that the value of his good works is not based on their number and excellence, but on the love of God which prompts him to do these things.

Our good works must never be mirrors that reflect **our** goodness, but rather they must always be reflections of the Heavenly Father's goodness.

Ephesians 2:10 reminds us: "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago."

3. **Put simply, God created us to do good things.**

He created us to be salt and light in this world. He created us to be a reflection of His glory. He created us to go out and be His hands and feet, to go out and shine the light of HIS LOVE to world in desperate need.

It is our purpose to serve, give and love... so that people can see our goodness, but so that they can see His love in our lives.

Not so that they would praise us, but rather that they would praise the One who made us.

Conclusion: Jesus gave us words to live by:

What is an Externally Focused Church? It is a church that is "increasingly convinced that effectiveness is not measured by what happens inside the church but rather by the impact the people of the church have on their communities. They are engaging their communities with truth and grace, good news and good deeds".

Let us all resolve to be about the business that God has called us to! Amen? Let us pray...