

2020 02 09 – Salt & Light

Matthew 5:13-20

Our world news has been filled with two major stories this week. What were they? (*wait for response*) Yes, our news sources have been following the spread of the 2019 novel coronavirus and the impeachment trial in the U.S. senate. So we all know that over 800 people have died as a result of this virus – more than the total number killed by SARS back in 2003. And we also know that they acquitted President Trump. The U.S. Senate found him not guilty of both charges against him: abuse of power and obstruction of Congress.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/impeachment-senate-trial-trump-1.5452967>

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/coronavirus-deaths-sars-1.5457051>

I am not going to talk about the politics of this issue; but I do want to look at the actions of one of the senators. On Wednesday, Mitt Romney became the first senator ever to vote to impeach a president from his own party. In the speech that he made in the Senate before the vote, Senator Romney said, “I take an oath before God as enormously consequential.” Basically, he was saying that his vote was a reflection of his Christian faith. Since the vote, there have been many statements from politicians and others suggesting that Romney’s faith had little to do with his actions and other statements praising him for following his convictions.

I am not going suggest that I know the inner workings of Mitt Romney’s mind and heart. I don’t. But I am interested in this hypothetical question: Assuming Romney’s actions were motivated by faith, and recognizing the political and

personal backlash that he is experiencing as a result of his actions, would I have had the courage to do the same? Would I have had the courage to risk my reputation and my career in order to speak my truth, in order to do what I believed was the way of justice and peace, the way of the kingdom of God?

I'm asking this question because I believe this is what Jesus was calling his followers to do in today's scripture reading. Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world... your light must shine before others so that they may see your good acts and give praise to your Abba God in heaven." Jesus was telling his followers that their actions were important, that their actions would be seen by others as a reflection of their faith and of their God.

Like Jesus' disciples we are also called to perform good acts, acts that demonstrate our faith. Of course, there are many ways that we already shine our light or spread our saltiness in the world. You, as members of this congregation, are involved in our Loose Change Supper, the Benevolent Fund, Christmas Hampers, Meals on Wheels and Christmas in July. You reach out beyond this community through Mission & Service, the Foodgrains Bank, and other global appeals. And through our Affirming Ministry process we are all working to break barriers and become a more inclusive church.

But Jesus was asking for more. He said, "But what if salt were to lose its flavour How would you restore it? It would be fit for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot... You don't build a city on a hill, then try to hide it, do you? You don't light a lamp, then put it under a bushel basket, do you?" Jesus knew

that his followers were frightened. He knew that they had already been mistreated because of him. In the verses preceding today's reading Jesus said,

“You are fortunate when others insult you and persecute you, and utter every kind of slander against you because of me. Be glad and rejoice, for your reward in heaven is great; they persecuted the prophets before you in the very same way.” (Matthew 5:11-12)

Jesus was telling his followers that even when times are tough, even your reputation is on the line, even when your well-being is at stake, it is not OK to hide your light under a bushel or lose your saltiness. Instead, this is the time when you need to demonstrate your faith, when you need to let their light shine, when you need to spread your saltiness in the world. Following Jesus is not always easy. Speaking and living God's truth can be painful.

Jesus knew that. He was constantly pushing the societal boundaries in his world. Jesus was known for breaking Jewish laws and thus putting himself at risk. He followed his heart as he healed on the Sabbath, talked to strange women, and ate with sinners and prostitutes. That's why Jesus had to clarify his relationship with the Hebrew scriptures when he said, “Don't think I've come to abolish the Law and the Prophets. I have come not to abolish them, but to fulfill them.” Jesus was not afraid to interpret the laws in ways that made sense to him – in ways that furthered peace and justice. He was not afraid to spread his saltiness or to let his light shine.

But I'm afraid that most of us struggle to follow in Jesus' footsteps. Like his disciples we often hide our light under a bushel. It's hard to speak up when our friends or family say things we don't agree with. It's hard to be open about supporting the LGBTQ community when we live in a socially conservative city. It's hard to speak up about the impact of fossil fuels on the environment when the oil industry is such a huge part of our local economy. It's hard to point out the wrongdoings of someone who has the power to destroy our career. It's hard to spread the news of a potential global epidemic when you live in a country that enforces silence. It's hard to find the courage to act or to speak up when our "good acts" can make our lives difficult.

But Jesus doesn't give us a choice. He's not asking us to be light or salt. He's telling us, "You are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world." He knows that's true because he knows that Abba God, the Ground of our Being, the Holy Mystery, the Essence of Love is already within each and every one of us. When we let our light shine, what we are actually doing is allowing God's light to shine through us. With our good acts we are creating a window so others can see God's everlasting and unconditional love.

The good news is that we are not doing this on our own. The courage and the strength that we need to be the light, to spread our saltiness, comes from God. The support and accountability that we need comes from being a part of this faith community. So the next time you are about to hide your light under a basket remember that you are not alone. Be the light. Let your light shine.