

SERMON
“Moonlight Cove”
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February 6, 2011
St. John’s Chapel UCC

Isaiah 58: 1-9a

Matthew 5: 13-20

“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 under foot.

“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.

SERMON

Two Sundays ago I told you that for the author of Matthew the church is God's engine of evangelism. God's means of saving the world is through the words and **works** of ordinary people like you and me. Matthew sandwiches his gospel between the call of the disciples to be fisher of people (evangelist) at the beginning of his gospel and ends it with the *Great Commission* in chapter 28: 19; "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

With that in mind, hear again the lesson on saltiness and light. Salt and light are the symbols used to portray the God within that we hide not. We maintain our saltiness. We let our light shine so others may see our good works and give glory to God. Now if that is not evangelism, I don't know what is. Evangelism is not only about saying a good word for Jesus. God's means of saving the world is through the words and works of ordinary people like you and me.

Now, the trick of this passage is how works relate to saltiness and light.

Once on an airplane as I was reading a horror novel, an answer to this relationship surfaced. I read horror novels when I fly. They keep my mind off my fear of flying. Until that day I had never realized how some writer use farfetched horror to unlock truth.

"Sam, an FBI agent, who had come to Moonlight Cove, California, to investigate some strange occurrences in town, was scratching behind Moose's ears, a service dog trained to assist a disable Vietnam vet. As he scratched, he thought, "It might not be so bad to be one of the so called lower beasts, a creature mostly of instincts, untroubled by a complex intellect. Or at the other extreme... a genuinely intelligent computer, all intellect and no feelings whatsoever. The great dual burden of emotion, and high intelligence are singular to humankind, and it's what

made life so hard; you end up thinking about what you were feeling instead of just going with the moment, or you were trying to feel what you thought you should feel in a given situation.

Thoughts and judgment were inevitably colored by emotions—some of them on a **subconscious level**, so you didn't even entirely understand why you make certain decisions, acted in certain ways. Emotions cloud your thinking; but thinking too hard about your feelings takes the edge off them. Trying to feel deeply and think perfectly clear at the same time was like simultaneously juggling six Indian clubs while riding a unicycle backward along a high wire.”

As I read this, I knew it was unlocking the mystery of the Matthews symbols of not losing our saltiness and letting our light shine so that others will see the good works of God.

As I continued to read, the blood-chilling thriller *Midnight* by Dean Koontz it stretched to the extreme the resulting horror in our futile attempts to escape the human burden of coping with the interplay of emotion and intellect.

Thomas Shaddock, a genius, conceived and built New Wave Micro-technology and headquartered it in Moonlight Cove, California. Shaddock had long struggled against the limitation of the emotional human condition and wished to transcend. He was certain that the basic problem with the human animal was its extremely emotional nature. He wished to free himself and the world from this burden. He was convinced that people would be mentally healthier, physically healthier, and intellectually more efficient, if so freed.

Strong emotions—hatred, love, envy, jealousy, the whole long list of human passions—regularly destabilized the biological functions of the body. Medical researchers had proved that different emotions stimulate the production of different brain chemicals. Those chemicals in turn induce the various organs and tissues of the body to either increase or reduce or alter their function in a less than productive fashion. Shaddock was confident that a person whose body

was ruled by his/her emotions could not be a totally healthy person, and never an entirely clear-thinker.

He, therefore, set out, designed and began the implementation of a project to eliminate the consequences of emotions. From an ordinary looking, fingernail size, silicon microchip, he developed the microspheres that were one four-thousandth the size of a microchip—small enough to float unnoticed in a solution that could be injected into the human bloodstream. Through the bloodstream they flowed. Until, they attached themselves to different organs within the body. Through injection, a super-supercomputer was put inside the human body.

The microsphere computer within each of the New People monitored every organ in the body. When it detected the production of various amino-acid compounds produced in response to strong emotions, it used electrical stimuli to override and shut off the flow, thus eliminating the physical consequences of an emotional outbreak.

Shaddock thought he was creating an evolutionary superior civilization. Through the elimination of emotions, people were going to evolve at a very rapid pace into superior creatures. By the time Sam, the FBI agent, reached town there were monstrous creatures roaming in the dark of midnight. For the emotionless people of Moonlight Cove had evolved into heartless machine like intellects, or they had regressed. Some chose freedom from responsibility, from worry, from the pressure of the civilized world, from having to think too much. Without emotions they had succumb to the temptation to be purely instinctive creature, free to roam and partake of the excitement of the hunt, and the fulfilling of their appetite for pleasure. The others had chosen to lose themselves in the intensity of intellectual quest. Neither was a very pretty sight to behold.

Trying to juggle thoughts and feelings simultaneously reeks of the impossible. To have anger in our hearts is an interworking of thought and feeling. As a man or woman think-eth, so they feel. We assess whether people are being just, or fair in their dealings with us. When we think they are not, we experience feelings of anger. As a woman or man think-eth and feel-eth in their heart of hearts, so they do-eth. This is the inevitable human condition. To try and undo one hair of our design, to eliminate hatred, love, envy, jealousy, grief, and even fear (I know I preach my Christmas sermon on “fear not” but this does not mean we are to rid ourselves of genuine fear)—to do away with the whole long list of human passions will only rob us of our saltiness, our humanity from which can flow the light of God.

When we are behaving as “salt of the earth” kind of people the light of God shine forth in our work. When we are crusty old, salty people with our divine light exposed, it will show in our work. Strong emotions make us passionate and enthusiastic about our work. It puts light in our eyes. People notice, and are drawn to us.

College students often told me the main reason they wanted to be a part of the United Ministry Center was because we were so passionate about what we were doing. They saw it in our eyes as we took a stand for Jesus’ position against violence.

My granddaughter told me the Saturday before we were to go to church together for the 200th Anniversary of Park Avenue Christian Church that her dad asked her why she would want to go. He said, “You want like it. Church is boring!”

I told her, “Well, you will just have to go and see for yourself.” Thankfully it was not boring at all. She smiled when I asked her, “Well, what do you think. Is church boring?”

“No!” she said with a twinkle of light in her eye.

I can understand why her dad told her this. I've set through many a boring church services. Religious institutions often lack any sense of spirituality and passion about their faith. In the 60's many church found their meaning in doing social justice. In so doing many lost the emotional element of their faith. Even became distrustful of emotional responses to faith. What a shame! What a curse to lose our saltiness, our passion. For when salt has lost its saltiness it is no longer good for anything, but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. Then spirituality gets relegated to the absurd and there is no light to put under a bushel.

This shall not be, not here, not here at St. John's Chapel UCC. For we shall be the salt of the earth with fully exposed light showing in our work—which, by the way, is where the word worship originated. Worship is the work of people juggling thoughts and feelings simultaneously in the glow of possible. Amen.

- Ending that when we are salt and when light is emoting from us all our show in our works.
- Remember two Sundays ago I told you that for Matthew, the church is God's engine of evangelism. God's means of saving the world through the words and works of ordinary people like you and me.

With that in mind, hear again the lesson on saltiness and light. Salt and light are the symbols used to portray God within us. We maintain our saltiness. We let our light shine so others may see your good works and give glory to God. Maintaining our saltiness and letting our light shine. Now if that is not evangelism, I don't know what is. Evangelism is not only about saying a good word for Jesus. It is about letting our saltiness, our goodness and our light show in the good works that we do.

February 6, 2011

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

Communion

Scripture: **Matthew 5: 13-20**

Theme: That whichwith is unique about us, our saltiness give flavor to the world, our light that lights the path for others—
–in reference to Knotz's novel, going to either extreme, emotionless or justgoing on instinct both rob us of our humanity, our uniqueness, our holiness.

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