

February 5, 2023
Communion

Matthew 5:13-20

“It Was Meant to Be”

How many of you ever took piano lessons? Played sports in school? How many of you studied math – just for fun? We are a diverse group of people. Every group is. Some people develop a lifetime relationship with music while others discover a connection with physical activity which morphs into hiking, world traveling or a serious love of the gym. No matter which activity resonates with our souls –there are others for whom the connection just isn’t there. This variety of humanity can make it hard for us to get along.

This turns out to be true in our life of faith as well. Not everyone loves the same hymns or style of music. Experiences of prayer can vary between us and where we are on the path to spiritual growth can be diverse. Even at church, we are not all the same. Which can be tough because part of what we want at church is to feel that we belong. There are times we are in sync with one another – but we are on thin ice when we expect faith to wash over our differences to make everything easy.

Bumping up against differences can be annoying. We really want the world around us to fit together in such a way that we agree with it and are happy. But life experience teaches us the world doesn’t revolve around any of us. We find our way in the world as individuals, of course, ***but if that is all we do we will have missed the boat.***

Jesus says, You are the light of the world – you are the salt of the earth. And we hear our rampant individualism being validated. “I must believe the world revolves around me – Jesus said so!” ***Except...he didn’t.*** In English we have no differentiation between you as an individual and “You” as in “all ya’all”. But there is a clear difference in Greek. And Jesus says – “*All ya’all* together are the salt of the earth.” You as a community are meant to be the light of the world.

This is helpful because it takes the pressure off each of us and gives us even more reason to ***live in the community of faith*** we need and were intended to be a part of. Most of us have felt the weight of expectation to be God’s children as too hard. We are human, after all. ***None of us alone can save the world and give light to all who need it.*** That’s Jesus job. Ours is to band together following Jesus to discover God working in and through us together. Church is a team venture. Yes, we have different strengths and weaknesses – but we all follow the same leader. ***Our life together as God’s children is all about “we.”***

Life teaches us we need a moral compass: guidelines for living. Traditionally this has been seen as rules – the commandments – or, in Jesus language today, *the law*. We can imagine the first Jewish Christians trying to figure out the implications of God becoming one of us in Jesus. The law had always been the way God showed love to people – what is its place now?

It's a fair question as Jesus questioned some of what was considered God's law. We see in his ministry Jesus calling into question the rules surrounding keeping the Sabbath. If it is a commandment how hard can it be to know what to do? Except that it is. "***The Sabbath was made for people not people for the Sabbath***" is Jesus corrective to taking this law by its letter instead of its spirit. There are many examples of Jesus correcting the practice of the law – so how can he say the law will never pass away?

Well, when Jesus says our righteousness must exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees was he saying his followers should be more or less legalistic than the Pharisees? Was he saying his disciples should be more focused on the *letter* or the *spirit* of the law? These texts are less clear to us because we don't have all the assumptions they did in our hip pocket. It is those assumptions, for example, which make sense of Jesus prohibition against divorce – which was more about *protecting women* than it is about the *nature of marriage*.

Back when I was a young man, I had a friend from Kentucky who spoke of the way different family clans in the town he was from used the office of sheriff against each other. We might think of this as "The Hatfield's and the McCoy's." Being pulled over was either no problem or a big worry depending on who had won the last sheriff's election. ***It was a weaponization of the law***. I believe this is precisely what Jesus is *warning* against today. The law being leveraged and used rather than *its spirit being discovered and honored*.

As together we honor and pursue the spirit of the law – those of us who never thought God could use us turn out to be *the very people* through whom God brings *life, light and salt* in the world. No matter which kind of the many kinds of people there are in the world we are. Friends, this is the way it is meant to be. God help us to own the opportunities we have been given. God help us all together to be salt and light in a world which desperately needs them.