A close up of a sign

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**February 9, 2020 – You Are…**

**Given by Rev. Mattei**

We would all agree that one nice thing about living in the Southern part of Florida is the weather in Winter. It is nice not to have to deal with the snow: shoveling it, walking on it, or driving through it. During Northern Winter months, I was very grateful for salt on sidewalks and on roads. There was nothing shameful about salt being trampled underfoot. After a few falls during my early residence in the States, I made sure I always had a good supply of salt to spread around after I shoveled. I have also noticed how sunlight appears to last longer hours during the Floridian Winters compared to Winter days in the North. Salt on the road and walkways makes sense because it increases safety. Extra light is pleasant and improves people’s moods.

Obviously, Jesus was mostly talking about people’s inner disposition and how both salt and light describe God-given core elements that can be developed into values and motivating principles. He was affirming in his words: “You *are* all that!” He wasn’t holding back or being selective. *All* the people in his presence at that time and the people of all times and places are that salt and light indiscriminately. Why? Because all people are creations of God; we all have that imprint. We are not God but we are all wanted by God, made out of Love and for Love. We all live and move and have our being in God,[[1]](#footnote-1) and all are “chosen in Christ before the world was made.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

Jesus’ mission was to awaken people’s awareness of the possibility of having an intimate relationship with God. His message was not to change our life so we wouldn’t be pulverized by God’s wrath in retaliation to our wrongdoing. Jesus’ message was about trusting God’s desire to be with us all the time. His message of grace was not merely the announcement of God’s unthinkable mercy and the willingness to forgive our sins, an undeserved gift, the result of unconditional love. Grace is the starting point of creation itself: God wills us into existence and God’s hope for us is to have abundant life in the relationship with God. closeness to God and life in God is grace. Apart from God and outside of God’s realm, there is no real life and we quickly shrink into fear, emptiness, greed, jealousy, judgment, and hatred.

Jesus is the perfect image of the Father who gives it all for a relationship with us and takes on himself all the evil we are capable of doing to one another. When you feel loved, there is nothing that you cannot do, nothing that holds you back. Jesus felt immensely loved. He knew Love and Love knew Jesus. Jesus appeared weak, according to worldly standards. Yet, through him we now enjoy salvation and redemption. His might is evident in his faithful, persistent, and consistent love of us until the end, and this opens our eyes to see the mercy of God and what we are called to respond to. With the words of the psalmist, “In his light we see light.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

It is in this deep experience of being loved that the words of the apostle Paul were recorded in the letter to the faith community of Ephesus: “I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.”[[4]](#footnote-4) We could not be called to such high standards if we were not shown by Christ that this kind of life is possible. “But where will we find the resources?” you might ask. Jesus told us where: “You are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world.”

It is not our job to create salt and light: they are already in us. It is our job, however, to discover our inner power, trust and nurture it, and then put it at the disposal of God for the salvation of humanity.[[5]](#footnote-5) That’s how we grow to the full stature of Christ. With words that remind me of our baptismal reality, Orthodox priest, Fr. Anthony Bloom encourages us: “Let us rise in the morning and offer ourselves to God. We have woken from a sleep which divides us from yesterday. Waking up offers us a new reality, a day which has never existed before, an unknown time and space stretching before us like a field of untrodden snow. Let us ask the Lord to bless this day and bless us in it.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

God’s gifts of salt and light in us are for our personal wellbeing and for the benefit of the world. The prophet Isaiah warns us against false pretence and lack of integrity. He uncovers a worship that has nothing to do with reverence to God because it does not reflect God’s intention for an honest response to the needs of the world: “Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am. If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil.”

Our worship of God is truthful and honest when it reflects integrity of living: “Worship and living are not two separate realms. Unless living is a form of worship, our worship has no life.”[[7]](#footnote-7) How often our daily life does not align with our Christian values? How often our Monday through Saturday behavior is not reflective of the Sunday morning longings and prayers? What if we made an effort during the week to be aware of the presence of God which surrounds and sustains us? What if we behaved during the week as on Sunday morning?

Let us pray: Heavenly and gracious God, you have called us as your own and have formed and shaped us to be your people. Help us to grow more fully into a community of believers that trust in your Word. Be with those who are not with us, who may be struggling or suffering in this world; give them a sense of peace that passes all understanding, and bring us all closer to you. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

1. Acts 17:28 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ephesians 1:4 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Psalm 36:9 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ephesians 4:1-6 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ephesians 3:16-19 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Anthony Bloom, Beginning to Pray, Paulist Press, 1970, p. 23 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Abraham Heshel, God in Search of Man: a Philosophy of Judaism, Harper & Row, 1966, p. 384 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)