

“I AM HERE TO BE YOUR NEIGHBOR”

Matthew 5:13-20

St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin

January 25-26 & 29, 2020

“It’s beautiful day in the neighborhood. It’s a beautiful day for a neighbor. Would you be mine? Could you be mine? Won’t you be my neighbor?” 1968-2001. Four generations with *Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood*. When Fred Rogers taught about being a neighbor, to whom did he speak—to ME or the other guy? To ME, of course! How scriptural of that Christian minister! Almost all of us know of Mr. Rogers and something about being a neighbor. Can we test our neighborliness this day? 😊

1. Does the Christian enter marriage primarily to give or to get?

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. (Ephesians 5) Less ME; more Jesus.

2. Does the Christian take on a job primarily to give or to get?

Obey your earthly bosses in everything; not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. (Colossians 3) Less ME, more Jesus.

3. Does the Christian become a parent to give or to get?

Fathers, do not frustrate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. (Ephesians 6) Less ME; more Jesus.

Jesus would agree with Mr. Rogers: **IT IS A BEAUTIFUL DAY TO BE A NEIGHBOR...AFTER ALL WE ARE GOD’S SALT, WE ARE HIS LIGHT**—making a difference! Let’s mine his Truth! 😊

1. THE POTENTIAL OF THE SALT

A. In Each and Every Grain

“You (plural 😊) are the salt of the earth.” Salt has great potential, wouldn’t you agree? In each and every grain! A grain of salt begins to flavor—“This is a great burger!” A grain of salt begins to preserve—“These pickles are awesome!” A grain of salt begins to melt; safer roads for you and me!

B. IN the Collective Whole

Salt has great potential, wouldn’t you agree? But most of the time salt is best used ***as a collective whole***. To salt my eggs with one grain? Not enough! To tell my wife, “I am going out to salt the driveway,” and then to launch a grain from a second story window? Not so much! Salt is often best used in measured quantities—to please your cardiologist and your God.

Salt TOGETHER...is saltier. Salt TOGETHER gets the job done. With each grain doing its part!

APPLICATION Why do you and I DO “the Christian thing”? Walk the Christian walk? I hope it is because it is REAL for us—as real as salt!

Jesus' blood and righteousness **preserve** us for eternal life! The forgiveness of sins works faith and fills us with sure hope as we face physical death. I WILL RISE!

Jesus' promises **flavor** life and give us great joy! ***"Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and obey it...Even in the valley of the shadow of death you ARE with me."*** It is always a beautiful day to be a neighbor when MY #1 Neighbor is my God!

Jesus' love in the sacrament—***"This is for YOU for the forgiveness of your sin"***--melts the cold and the darkness of guilt and brings the light of God's face back into my walk!

God starts with ONE grain of salt, his Son, and touches us one by one! But it gets even better!

Why do you and I SHARE the Christian walk? Well, salt TOGETHER is saltier! Who has the spiritual gift of prayer—praying mightily about stuff? Who has *ACTIVE* love for those in need? Who has the spiritual gift of leadership? Who has the gift of faith—the kind that holds on tight when the boat is rocking and the winds are howling? Who has people skills? And "John", we will make you the money guy—you got it from God and you love to spend it on Jesus!

To US Jesus says, ***"You (plural 😊) are the salt of the earth."*** Each of us a grain that preserves, flavors and melts. When we hang around Jesus, we get saltier. When we hang around each other, people "sense"—"taste"--Jesus and are curious about us...him!. Together...we are more!

Imagine if all seven of us got together—just like salt in the shaker--left Muskego and started a mission church somewhere else in the world that needed Jesus and his truth? We all love Jesus...he is the salt—preserving, flavoring, melting. We are all differently-gifted...that is a strength! What potential for his mission! "Won't you be our neighbor?" But if we can't all GO, can we still be salt here?

Now, imagine if one of us decided that there was no real value in hangin' around Jesus anymore and we began to lose our saltiness? What real value would I be to my neighbor over the backyard fence? What value to YOU if my presence only sucks spiritual life rather than sharing the salt that preserves? What happens to the shaker if the salt stops being salty one grain at a time? **What good is salt without its saltiness?** It is thrown out and trampled underfoot!

2. THE PURPOSE OF THE LIGHT

A. Own Its Reality

So Jesus encourages us more. ***"You are the light of the world...like a city that can't be hidden on a hill. Do not hide the light. Place it on its stand to give light to everyONE in the house. Live your life for your Father in heaven that the world may see him and praise the God who makes you shine!"***

Have you ever set out to BE the "dim bulb" on any team, in any circle of friends, in your family? Heavens, no!! But have we ever been afraid to shine for Jesus on this earthly walk? **Do we ever on purpose turn the dimmer**, crank down the voltage, so that WE blend INTO the darkness of the world? "Can someone else please shine so that I don't have to?"

"YOU are the light of the world." My friends, there is no getting around this one. To belong to Jesus IS to shine". Let us grab hold of that fact and OWN it!

B. Own Its Power

But how? Jesus says that the light is seen in the good deeds we do--deeds that give glory to our Father in heaven.

When God is our Father, we recognize that he made this world, designed our bodies, determines healthy relationships—what true LOVE is and does. “Good deeds” are what is right in the eyes of the Creator. When you and I unconditionally love all—even those who are hard to love—we reflect the love of our Father in heaven. When you and I do everything in every moment in every way that pleases God, we shine DIFFERENTLY than the darkness of this world!

But what if I am like the world and give the world “Nathan” rather than my Father in heaven? What if I make the moment about ME rather about my God? **I had a testing moment this last week.** I was on the phone regarding a credit card issue, stuck in the voicemail tree—“If you have a question on your balance, please Press 1”—kept me from talking to a live person for a good 30+ minutes. Having called back a couple of times, my blood pressure was up and so was the irritation—and when I finally got a live person whose heritage language what not MINE, well I was struggling!

But I was working on this sermon. **“Let your light so shine that they may see your Father in heaven.”** There is no moment in this life, no corner of my world, no decision I need to make, no relationship I could have—even a stranger on the phone--that Jesus does not claim for himself and for the living of true love. **“Until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.”** Jesus reined ME in, forgave my sin, and enabled me to shine for him. “Thanks for helping me today! **Won’t you be my neighbor?”**

APPLICATION How important is it to let the light of Jesus shine in every moment of our lives? Well, what is the alternative? To shine with the darkness of our world--condoning sin that *always* hurts, sin that brings death to relationships? **“Anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others to do likewise will be called least in the kingdom of heaven.”** Is ANY sin only an “innocent little thing”?

Jason was confirmed in a church just like this, but *HIS* driving under the influence finally got *HIM* killed, and it was *HIS* fault. But it didn’t help that the abuse of alcohol was modeled by an older brother. “Innocent fun?”

Janet was finally out of the abusive marriage. It was tough. The counseling would go on for a while. She was learning to value herself again in a godly way. She was regaining her voice to advocate for herself and her kids. And she was recognizing that her ex was responsible for his issues and not her...even though all he had ever known from his father was to abuse those closest to you. “Just a little family thing.”

To you and to me—by faith members of God’s family--Jesus says today, **“Let the light in you so shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”** God’s ways; God’s love; God’s care; God’s safety. God’s light!

CONCLUSION Do you think that Jesus sang at his carpenter’s bench in the years before his baptism into ministry? “It’s a beautiful day in the neighborhood. It’s a beautiful day for a neighbor. Father, they need me to be their neighbor. I know the darkness. I know their struggle. Only if I am their neighbor FIRST will they ever know a different way. Only if I pay for their sin and declare it forgiven will they know how to love! Heavenly Father, when the time comes for me to formally GO!, bless the work! I am here to be their neighbor.” Amen.

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