

# Indispensable Influences

## Matthew 5:13-16

### INTRODUCTION

Public research has consistently shown that the most dangerous place on earth to be ... is in the American home.

- On average 1200 abused women are killed every year. That equates to 15% of all the violent crimes committed.
- Many of the mass shootings our country is currently experiencing start off as or involve domestic violence.
- Sadly each year 20% of all police officers who are killed in the line of duty are killed while answering a domestic violence call.
  - This past summer we experienced that in our own community when on July 24 Officer Matthew Yates was killed in one such instance.

This epidemic is but one of the violent components to the world in which we live.

- In our lifetimes we have seen political differences escalate into hot-headed, divisive shouting matches that paralyze our lawmakers.
- Ohio's own recent decision to allow sports betting in the state has already seen an alarming rise in death threats being made on athletes on the losing side.
  - Just a few days ago Anthony Grant, the University of Dayton men's basketball coach, reported four of his players had been victims of such threats.

If we were not followers of Jesus Christ, we could very easily throw our hands into the air and admit defeat. But giving up is not an option for us. So how can we ever hope to change a culture like this one?

The answer to that question is at the heart of today's Gospel reading. If you have ever wondered what you can do, listen carefully to this message. It is a message that is beautifully illustrated

in a story told by Peter Marshall, a famous Presbyterian pastor who is best known for his days as the chaplain of the United States Senate.

A quiet forest dweller lived high above an Austrian village along the eastern slope of the Alps. The old man had been hired by the village below many years ago by the village council to clear away all the debris from the pools of water up in the mountain crevices that fed the lovely spring flowing through their town.

With faithful and silent regularity, he patrolled the hills, removed the leaves and branches and wiped away all the silt that would otherwise choke and contaminate the fresh flow of water. By and by the village became a popular attraction for tourists. Graceful swans floated along the crystal-clear spring. The millwheels of the various businesses located near the water turned day and night. Farmlands were naturally irrigated and the view from the homes and restaurants was picturesque beyond description.

The years passed and the members of the village council who contracted for the services of the old mountain man were replaced by new and younger leaders. One evening the town council met to adopt the budget for the coming fiscal year. One man's eye caught the salary figure being paid to the obscure keeper of the spring. "Who is this old man," he asked. "Why do we keep paying him all this money year after year? Has anyone ever seen him?"

No one could answer his questions, and so by a unanimous vote, the council dispensed with the old man's services.

For several months, no one noticed anything different. But autumn came and the trees began to shed their leaves. Little twigs fell into the mountain pools, hindering the rushing flow of sparkling water in the spring. And then after a short time people began to notice the water had become darker. Soon sections

of the water developed a slimy film along the banks and the water began to emit a foul odor. The film created problems for the millwheels and they began to break down and stop. The swans left, and so did the tourists.

The embarrassed town council called a special meeting. Realizing the error of their previous decision, they hired the old gentleman in the hills back as keeper of the spring. Within a few weeks the water began to clear up. The odor was gone. Both swans and tourists returned. And all was well in the village once again.

Even this is only a story, it highlights the truth of our Gospel text and points to the impact we as followers of Christ make in the violent and sin-filled world around us.

You are the salt of the earth, Jesus said. You are the light of the world. Not, you are **like** salt or **like** light. You are.

And here is His point.

You and I as followers of Christ are an indispensable influence in this world.

As bad as it is, it will only get worse if we are not fully engaged in our faith. Like the keeper of the spring, there is a noticeable difference if we fulfill our mission as salt and light. It may seem like the world doesn't want us, but they need us ... even if they don't realize it.

Jesus uses two images: salt and light. I am going to focus on salt in this message because in just a few weeks I will be preaching another sermon on what Jesus meant when He said that we, like Him, are the light of the world.

In the days of Jesus, some 2,000 years ago salt, was used primarily for two reasons: to preserve and to season. Those are still our primary uses today.

One commentator wrote:

A number years ago a buddy of mine spent a couple of months in Malawi in Africa. He told me that the staple food **there was called nsima**. For breakfast you got nsima. At lunch you got nsima. For supper you got nsima ... always great heaping piles of nsima.

Nsima is ground maize and water. My buddy John said that it tasted like a cross between oatmeal and wallpaper paste. There was no milk for it, no cream for it and no sugar for it. John said that the only way that you could make it taste any better was by adding salt. And I remain convinced that without the Christian church that this world would be much like nsima, flavorless and dull.

We are the salt of the earth.

Let me make two observations here.

### **OBSERVATION #1: WE NEED TO BE PRESENT ON THE TABLE**

I go back to the statement of Jesus:

**You are the salt of the earth. (Matthew 5:13)**

Over the years I have worked to cut down my intake of salt. Doctor's orders. And for the most part I am pretty good about that. But I have one exception. French fries. My French fries need salt.

- I have worked at concession stands where the customers want extra salt on their pretzels. Personally, I don't care. By the time I dip them in mustard or cheese, salt doesn't matter.
- But my French fries need salt. I don't dip my fries in anything. They need salt.

If I am eating at a restaurant and get fries with my bacon cheeseburger, I look for the salt shaker. If it is not there, we have a

problem. If my fries are to taste to my liking, the salt shaker needs to be on the table because the salt inside the shaker needs to be on my fries.

- Somewhere in that restaurant is a saltshaker with valuable salt inside it. But it is doing me no good if it isn't on my table.

When Jesus talks about the light, He tells us that it needs to shine. Don't hide the light under a bushel ... NO. Let it shine!

The same is true with salt. Salt needs to be present.

## **OBSERVATION #2: WE NEED TO REMAIN SALTY**

There is an important phrase in that 13<sup>th</sup> verse that we cannot miss:

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. (Matthew 5:13)

All across the world – and most certainly here in this country – Christians are surrendering their biblical values and becoming more in step with the values of the world. And it happens in very subtle ways. Entire denominations are falling victim to this as well.

Salt-less salt has no value. It neither preserves this generation nor adds positive flavor to it. Salt-less salt is like no salt at all.

This line in Matthew 5:13 made me think about the creation story. Remember how in Genesis 1 when God was in the act of creating our world, He would pause at the end of every day and say "It is good."

Here God-in-the-flesh Jesus declares that something is "good for nothing." Salt-less salt has no value whatsoever.

Could it be that the mess of this world is in large part due to salt-less churches and salt-less Christians?

- What would we discover if we did an honest review of our own values, thinking, habits and calendars?
- Would we taste salty?
- Could it be that the world is searching for something that makes what they experience taste better ... that they just need a little bit of salt?

## APPLICATION

I hope you hear two things ringing in your heads right now.

### 1. You are designed to be an influence for Christ in this world.

- Keepers of the spring
- Maybe not always noticed or appreciated
- But definitely missed when you are not there.

And because #1 is true, so is this statement:

### 2. You are indispensable.

- This world ... this church ... needs you to be salty salt.

Let me close with this story from the life of Rebecca Pippert, author of the book "Out of the Salt Shaker and Into the World." It is a classic example of how salt makes a difference. Rebecca writes:

Once when I was flying from San Francisco to Portland, I arrived at the ticket counter and was greeted by an exceedingly friendly male ticket agent.

"Well, hel -lo-o-o-o there!" he said.

"I need to pick up my boarding pass to Portland, please."

"Gee, I'm sorry. You won't be able to fly to Portland tonight."

"Why? Has my flight been canceled?"



“No, you won’t be able to fly to Portland tonight because you will be having dinner with me instead.”

“What?”

“Listen,” he said, “I know this great restaurant with a hot band. You won’t regret it.”

“Oh, I am so sorry,” I replied. “But I have to get to Portland tonight.”

“Well, okay then. Too bad though. Hey, I can’t find your ticket. Looks like we have a date!”

“Oh, I forgot to tell you. It is a special ticket.”

“Is it youth fare?” he asked.

“No, um ... well ... it’s clergy,” I whispered as I leaned over the counter.”

He froze. “CLERGY?” he shouted, as the entire airport looked our way. His face went absolutely pale, and as he looked again for my ticket he was muttering to himself, “Oh no, I just flirted with a nun.”

I got my ticket and turned to leave when I heard him say to a co-worker “See that girl? She’s clergy.” Another man’s head peeked over the top of the counter and offered me a forced smile.

She concludes “I have never felt so religious in my life.”

You are the salt of the earth. You are an indispensable influence. Even when you aren’t necessarily trying.

Amen.