

The Rev. Kimberly Reinholz
Grace and Holy Trinity
February 9, 2020
Matthew 5:13-20

Salt and light are seminal images in Christian speech. How many sermons, books, or podcasts have you encountered where the preacher, author, or commentator mentioned salt or light concerning the children of God? One might wonder if they were even talking about God, the God we know, worship, and follow if salt or light wasn't mentioned. This incarnate God. Jesus Christ, God made human who gives us this metaphor of what God's followers ought to be saline and bright.

But because these images have become so synonymous with Christianity, it's dogma and doctrine they also have in some ways sense become neutered and stale in our shared consciousness. It is easy to point out that our relationships with salt and light are very different than the relationship that Jesus and the people of the first century Palestine had with them. These essential elements of life as preservation and indications of the passing of time and season for the early Church hold for 21st century American Christians, some foreboding health concerns about sodium consumption, and the illusion of light being something we can turn on and off.

Especially when I sit during the wee hours with my child who is sick. While I witness the lamentations of our Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and non-conforming siblings. When I sip coffee with primary caregivers living with loved ones with illnesses that have no names, or diagnoses, or a terminal prognosis. I wonder what good is salt and light. There are such deep wounds in our city that the needs of those who are unsheltered by providing permanent, affordable housing, are ignored and instead, we fight about public safety, blaming those who have the most to lose for doing the best that they can to survive.

I feel like I am drowning alongside each of these children of God. All of whom are suffering. I wonder in this sea of anguish if the salt has lost its flavor. If this light has been extinguished. This is when the tears come, the holy, blessed tears.

Salt and light embodied.

Crying.

Cry out do not hold back tears-
The tears of pain and joy
the tears of sorrow and frustration

Cry out those tears O Daughter's of Zion
Cry out that anger O Sons of Israel
Cry out with anxiety O Children of the Most High
Cry out, Cry out, Cry out.

Do not let it be said that boys don't cry.
Do not let it be said that weeping is for the weak.
Do not let it be known that tears are anything other than holy.

Our tears refresh us and allow us to be bathed in the waters of baptism,
rechristened as compassionate siblings,
our salt-stained cheeks will be the bearers of our light to the world.

Cry out our sins that have separated us
Cry out our sins which we have committed in the name of love

Cry out our sins which we have promoted in the name of progress
Cry out our sins which we have continued unwittingly, if not unwillingly
Cry out one another and let those among us without sin be the first to condemn the other
Cry out, cry out, cry out.

With our tears let us be reminded that only closed eyes weep
With our tears let us hold one another close,
With our tears, let us bring one another into the embrace of our Mother God.
Let us hold one another and let us be held by one another while we weep.
There is much to mourn, there is much to lament, there is much to be redeemed through love.

Cry out those tears O Daughters of the Revolution
Cry out those tears O Daughters of Maggie Walker
Cry out those tears O Sons of the Confederacy
Cry out those tears O Sons of Gabriel Prosser
Cry out those tears O Children of Wars with No Names
Cry out those tears O beloved children of God
Cry out those tears in witness, cry out those tears in protest, cry out those tears in celebration, cry
out these tears O God, cry out.

We are the salt of the world, we are the light of the world.

There is no denying it.
There is no controlling it.
There is no extinguishing it.
There is no desalinating it.

It is who we are. It is who we will always be.

Beloveds, cry out because it is who you are.

The tears come. They come unbidden, unwelcome, unexpectedly. But they come. Tears come to cleanse our hearts and minds to open our souls to new paths to heal our wounds and help us bear our scars.

Take those scars and use them to help someone else heal. We are not all sick, all wounded, all mourning, all caretaking simultaneously. Each of us is invited to be a light to another person who is in the midst of turmoil. This is what I love about being light and salt to the world. That they can be present in the same moment- in the form of tears and in the form of compassion.

We can show one another the light of hope, without all the Hallmark cheesiness, please. We do not need to provide answers to our fellow human beings who are suffering to provide light.

We can show the light by simply being present to one another, witnessing one another's reality and reflecting back the truth as we see it. In therapeutic settings, individuals might participate in what is called an imago dialogue, and I would like to encourage each of us to engage in one conversation, which takes this model up before the end of this season of light-bearing, Epiphany, ends at the end of this month.

I have made a visual guide for this as well and share it with you all through our electronic media outlets and there are a few copies in the back of the church if you want one now. Thanks to Shelby Scattergood our administrative assistant for making that image.

Here's how Imago dialogue works. The first person let's call them Joseph initiates the conversation. The second person, let's call them Mary, responds.

Joseph: Mary, can we talk about this conception thing? Is now a good time?

Mary: Not right now, I am milling the grain for bread, could we talk during dinner?

Joseph: Okay let's talk during dinner.

This first part is essential because it determines a mutually agreed upon time that the two individuals will discuss a specific topic, uninterrupted, and with intention.

The second step is equally important- that is keeping the appointment and not preplanning, prejudging, or expecting the conversation to go a certain way. Keep your own reactions in check, don't sigh, roll your eyes, or jump to conclusions. Engage in the conversation listening carefully so that you can mirror back what one another is thinking and feeling.

Later that evening:

Joseph: Is now a good time to talk?

Mary: Yes, now is a good time to talk. What did you want to talk about?

Joseph: The baby you are carrying.

Mary: Oh, yes, that. What would you like to discuss?

Joseph: So you said that an angel appeared to you and told you would have a child by God?

Mary: Yes, that is what happened. Gabriel appeared and told me not to be afraid and that I would bear a son, and that son would be Emmanuel.

Joseph: I would like to tell you how that makes me feel. If that's okay with you.

Mary: of course. How does it make you feel Joseph?

Joseph: It makes me feel like I am not really part of your story, and you might not want to marry me after all.

Mary: What I hear you say is that you don't think I want to marry you and that you aren't really part of my story, is that right?

This third step is mirroring. Listen carefully to one another and repeat back what you hear. Ask clarifying questions, is that right? Did I miss anything?

Joseph: Yes, that's right.

Mary: Is there anything more you want to say about that?

Joseph: Well, I've been thinking about dismissing you from our engagement. Quietly, of course, I wouldn't want you to be disgraced or anything...

Mary: What I hear you saying is that you want to end our engagement. Is that right?

Joseph: Well, I am leaning that way.

Mary: Is there more you want to say?

Joseph: I feel like God chose you and not me, and that feels really awful.

Mary: I hear that you feel like I am chosen, and you are not. Did I misunderstand?

Joseph: No, that's pretty much it.

Mary: Is there anything else you want to say about this?

Joseph: No, that's pretty much it.

The next step is validation, which is where Mary considers Joseph's perspective and understands where he is coming from, even if it isn't her experience. Mary shows empathy expressing how Joseph might feel.

Mary: Joseph, I hear what you are saying that God has chosen me and that you feel like you are left out of the relationship. I can imagine how that would feel alienating, and I want to encourage you to sleep on it one more night. I appreciate you sharing your feelings with me.

Joseph: thank you for listening. Would you like to share anything?

Mary: Not right now, thank you.

End scene

This kind of dialogue is I think one way that we can reflect the love of God back to those who we are in a relationship with. Many thanks to my therapists who have reminded me of this tool often when I have been struggling with broaching difficult topics and to my friend Sara Shisler Goff who reintroduced it to me this week as well. I know it has helped me share light with the world. I hope it will help you as well.

There is a simpler version of imago mirroring called echoing that is so easy to do that I am going to invite you to do it with me right now.

In honor of crying out from the mountain top, in honor of crying our tears and reflecting God's love in the world one conversation at a time. Let us pray the Shrine Mont shouting prayer. A prayer that I first learned from Tony Pompa, former Canon to the Ordinary of Bishop Lee, now Dean of The Cathedral Church of the Nativity, in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

I wasn't a Shrine Mont camper, but on this camp Sunday, I claim this prayer as all of ours. Let us remember it as a source of our salt and light. Ready-

Repeat after me - shouting, remember...

God loves the world! (God loves the world!)

God loves us! (God loves us!)

God loves you! (God loves you!)

I love you! (I love you!)

God loves me! (God loves me!)

I love me! (I love me!)

Thanks be to God! (Thanks be to God!)

Amen! (Amen!)

Aaaamen! (Aaaamen!)