



Just a Day? ***Influence Like a Servant***

October 4, 2015

Matthew 5:13-16

"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 by men.

¹⁴ *"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.*

¹⁶ *In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*

There's an excellent description of salt in our journal (p 37). Salt is primarily a preservative; it's also a seasoning. It has hundreds of uses. Throughout history it's had huge economic implications, and it's even had religious implications. We simply can't live without it. Physically, when we are low on salt we are at risk. When you think of Jesus' audience in Israel where there could be extreme heat (and without air conditioning), having enough salt was a matter of life and death. So one day Jesus looked at those eager young men who were following Him and he said: "You are that element in society and you are to penetrate and permeate society." Salt penetrates. Put some of it into a glass of water and the entire glass tastes salty. Put some on the tip of your tongue and it will permeate within your entire body.

Unfortunately, many Christians withdraw and they don't penetrate and permeate society. But Jesus said he would send his disciples out as "sheep among wolves." He meant he was injecting salt into society. He wanted the character, conduct and compassion of his disciples to penetrate every part of the world in which they lived. ***"Go to the lost, confused people right here in the neighborhood. Tell them that the kingdom is here. Bring health to the sick. Raise the dead. Touch the untouchables. Kick out the demons. You have been treated generously, so live generously."*** (Mt. 10:6-8 THE MESSAGE)

There's much darkness in our world. Light always has a source, but darkness is the absence of light. Living like a servant causes followers of Jesus to stand apart and

be different. This has always been the case, ever since Jesus told about it. Jesus calls us to be salt and light – positive influences in our world.

Asbury partners with a North Tulsa Elementary school, Walt Whitman (“Asbury and Whitman” = “A&W”). Walt Whitman was a 19th century American poet (1819-1892). In his poem, “O Me! O Life!”, he describes our shortcomings and contradictions, but then answers his own questions:

***O Me! O Life! Of the questions of these recurring;
Of the endless trains of the faithless – of cities filled with the foolish;
Of myself forever reproaching myself (for who more foolish than I, and who more faithless?)
Of eyes that vainly crave the light – of the objects mean – of the struggle ever renewed;
Of the poor results of all – of the plodding and sordid crowds I see around me;
Of the empty and useless years of the rest-with the rest me intertwined;
The question, O me! So sad, recurring – What good amid these, O me, O life?***
(He questions, “Why am I here?” Then he answers)

***Answer: That you are here – that life exists, and identity;
That the powerful plays goes on and you will contribute a verse***

What’s your verse? How can you contribute?

that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. Thinking right leads to acting right which has influence for the Kingdom of God. There are lasting rewards to this.

We are to have **INFLUENCE**. Frequent flyers rarely see anything but the same airports, rental car companies and hotel chains. When they travel they don’t really “see” anything, they just go to a destination and return. I heard about one guy loved his frequent flyer status that he took a round trip flight from Houston to Paris, landed, walked down a few gates and boarded another flight back to Houston – just so he could keep his elite status. It helps him get an occasional upgrade and some other perks. Frequent flyers want to be seated in aisle seats close to the front. You get more room in an aisle seat and once the little bell sounds you can exit the plane faster. Then you get to ride in the rental car shuttle which will take you to your car which you can drive to the same hotel chain you always stay in. There’s nothing wrong with this.

However...we can only see life from the aisle seat. When the pilot says: “If you look out the window you’ll see such and such...” the aisle seat doesn’t look. There is more going on then what you see from the aisle seat. The aisle seat only sees

the inside of the plane. It has an inward focus. In fact, when I ride in the aisle seat, I don't really care what the pilot says is out there. I'm only interested in getting to where I'm going. Frequent flyer aisle seat passengers know what they are doing. They've learned how to navigate the system. It's like they almost have their own language and behaviors. They see things through a different lens.

Could it be that Christians end up like aisle seat passengers? We have our own language ("the Trinity," "sanctification," "fellowship," "righteousness"). We have our own way of doing things. And churches can become aisle seat churches. Our scorecard is exclusively preoccupied with what's happening in our own 4 walls. If we want to be the best CHURCH – then the aisle seat is appropriate. But if we want to be the church that has an influence upon our COMMUNITY, then we're going to slide over to the window seat.

Failure to slide is like having salt poured out on us – which would ruin everything; or being bright-lighted by a car. If we fail to leverage our influence for a far greater good than we've lost our savor (and maybe our "savior," too) – we're not really any good. Salt and light are intended to be spread!

There are a LOT of needs in these areas. In the Parable of the Good Samaritan – the victim had a lot of problems (maybe it was his own fault and he deserved what he got, but that's not the point). He was at the point of death. BUT, the good news was that the religious duo passed by: the Priest/Levite. But they had aisle seats. They were too busy to help. They had other stuff on their plate. They stepped over and around the guy. They were probably headed to Jerusalem for some religious duty. They could explain their disengagement.

The Prodigal Son was like someone struggling with an addiction today. That's one problem in the story. But the real point of Jesus' story – not how bad the prodigal was but how indifferent and mean the older brother was. He was judgmental – like the Pharisees. You can picture him with arms crossed and shaking his head saying, "I told you he was worthless." The contrast between the unrighteous and the self-righteous was the genuine righteousness of God.

Changing aisle seats is hard, especially when we've been buckled into the same seat for decades. But let me tell you, the most rewarding part of life is when we start looking out the window and seeing the impact our lives can have upon others. It's very hard to get the church to go into the community – we don't want to give up our aisle seats. I can tell you something even harder – to get the community to come into the church. We need to be light and life to those who aren't even here. We've got to look out – we've got to go. Jesus calls us to be light and life to those who don't know His grace.

How can we permeate our community better? I think there are 4 places (beyond family/friends):

- 1.) Work
- 2.) School
- 3.) Neighborhood
- 4.) Play (Where we spend most of our time)

In Reggie McNeal's book, Kingdom Come, he told of traveling between Vienna and Salzburg, Austria. There was a World War 2 concentration camp in a city there. It's estimated that 200,000 people were taken there during WW2. Half died there. The prisoners were brought to the town on trains, were unloaded and they walked through the streets past the churches of the town. They went up the hill where the camp was located. They were killed and buried on the other side of the hill. McNeal's daughter was with him and she asked the question: "Daddy, wasn't Austria a Christian country? Why didn't they speak up? Why didn't they do anything about this?" There was no way that the people of the town didn't know what was going on. I realize how awful it would've been to have had to stand up to the Nazis. Dietrich Bonhoeffer paid for his protesting with his life. Corrie ten Boom described the difficulties of hiding Jews in Holland during this time. But this happened from 1938-1945. It makes me ask a follow-up question: "What's going on right now in the Tulsa community which we should do something about?" Personally, I think the best way for us to engage is at Work, in School and in our neighborhoods. But we're going to have to think differently than before. Think salt and light!

The movie, "War Room" makes a great point about influence. One woman, through the pain of her life, prays that God would put into her life a woman she could mentor. Her influence has tremendous impact. She's retired, has virtually no positional power – but she is salt and light to a woman in desperate need. I spoke at the Southside Rotary Club recently. I met a young man there who was very impressive. He told me that his single mom did an amazing job in raising him, but they lived in EXTREME poverty. He could've been bitter about it or felt sorry for himself and withdrawn, but he chose a different way. I was greatly impressed with his enthusiasm and presence. He leads a support group: "Men without Fathers."

At that Rotary Club meeting something amazing happened. It was quite personal! David Hughes, an Asbury member, invited me to speak. He had a "Good News for Modern Man" Bible. The front cover is torn off. It's got my name on it. I've known David since I was 15 years old and I gave him my Bible then. I'd not seen this Bible in 45 years – but instantly recognized the "Good News For Modern Man" edition. Someone else at that Rotary Club graduated in my class of 1972 from Rogers and

she spoke up. She said: "We called Tom 'preacher.'" That's 43 years later. That's influence.

Jesus wants us to join him on mission. But this invitation is full of risk. Jesus became a servant. He was poor. Some rejected his message and some initially joined only to fall away. He reached people who were outcasts (tax collectors and prostitutes). He stooped and washed feet. He was persecuted and crucified...but he overcame every obstacle, including death and the grave. Jesus was on a mission. He invites you to join him on that mission, too. We each have a choice – whether to opt in or opt out of His Kingdom. Of all the kingdoms you can live it, however, the Kingdom of God is by far, the very best. There's no comparison. Give yourself to his Kingdom and you'll find life.