

There are a lot of figures of speech in this Scripture. “The salt of the Earth.” That is the first figure of speech which Jesus used in this Scripture from Matthew.

Many of us have heard this expression all our lives. In fact, it is said that some folks, on reading the Bible for the very first time, come upon verse like this and say, “So, that is where it comes from, the Bible!” (Martha Grace Reese)

So, yes, Jesus said it first! He said it, as part of his famous sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, to his followers. His followers at that time were “mostly fishermen and other simple people.” So, one way of taking the expression is to mean any simple, good person or group of people. It is also used to convey a person or group who is very good, honest, moral, and respected as such. (on-line dictionary definition)

I know, I know, just what you wanted, an English lesson.

But of course, Jesus was not teaching a lesson about vocabulary and figures of speech, to get ready for that test on Friday.

No, Jesus was explaining how necessary and important Christians are to the world.

Salt is a very important item, now, and especially back in Jesus’ time. Salt occurs naturally; it is in sea water. It is very important; it is used to preserve and flavor food.

There is even an old folk tale like that. The man asks his three daughters how much they love him. The two older girls say grand and glorious things, which Dad loves. The youngest girl says, “Why, I love you like fresh meat loves salt.”

Dad doesn’t like this one bit, and kicks her out, so she goes on to have adventures. She takes on a disguise, so no one knows who she really is. She ends up marrying a Prince, OF COURSE. She makes the request that the big wedding feast which the King is giving will have no salt in the meat.

Her real father is invited, not knowing that the bride is his own daughter. He, and all the other guests, spit out the meat, in disgust, when they taste it. Dad even begins to cry, for now he understands what his daughter meant.

OF COURSE all is revealed. Bride and Dad claim each other, happy reunion. Bride is now a Princess, so she and the Prince live happily ever after, OF COURSE. (“Cap of Rushes.”)

Nowadays, with all our quite often excessive use of salt, we are going to need a different fairy tale.

But, back to Jesus’ sermon. Salt is a preservative and a flavor-er for food. In comparison, Christians add a “keeping” quality to this world. This world would probably not even be in existence if we didn’t have the Christian faith. Christians add a flavor to this world. I would say that this flavor has in it compassion and care, mercy and justice, and righteousness.

I hope that we all know a Christian person like that. Maybe you can remember a Sunday School teacher who meant so much to you, or a Scout leader. That person might even have made such a good, strong impression on our lives that when making our decisions, we think of Mrs. McCandless teaching about it. OR we remember Mr. (Livingston or Graver or Ives or Long) teaching us the Scout oath, as something to live by, not just learn and say. They were and are our examples to follow.

Isn’t that what the great story of the Unknown Scout is about, setting an example and being an inspiration? Some American man was in England, London, I think. It was very foggy and he got lost. A Boy Scout came along and helped the man find his way. The man wanted to give him some cash, as a thank you/tip. But the Scout declined. “Oh, no, that was just my good turn for the day. Scouts do a good turn daily.” The American man was very impressed, and when he got back to America, he had a hand in getting Scouting started in our country.

Jesus also said that his followers, then and now, are the light of the world.

Light is something we can see. Light can give us guidance. For instance, it is so much easier to walk through a house when there is a light on, or there is daylight. It is easier to walk outside, if the sun is shining, or the moon is bright, or we can a flashlight.

We can sometimes get by, in these situations, without the light, but it is a harder and takes more effort. The light which Christians are, helps to guide in the ways of the Lord.

Light also brings us clarity; it clears things up for us. I once gave a flashlight to my little cousin for Christmas. He started using it right away, and even checked for cobwebs up in the corners. My aunt was not exactly pleased!

But, if we can't see something, we can't do much about it—from cobwebs to really big problems.

That's one thing we can say about the Methodist church—if there is a problem or disaster, from hungry people to a hurricane—we are working to help fix it!

Jesus also said that his followers (that means us, the Christians of now, too) are a “city on a hill.” Our faith and our lives are meant to show.

A different version of the Bible (the Message) puts it this way, verses 14-16: “You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a basket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine!”

Isn't that great? Shine! Let people see our good works and give glory to God, our Father in heaven!

This one is important to get exactly right, of course. We are to let the good things we do show. We are not to take out an ad, or brag about them. The good things can speak for themselves, and then the glory is given to God, as it is supposed to, rather than to us.

Lastly, Jesus talked about the “the law” and “the prophets.” He made it clear that he did not come to this world to get rid of the law and the prophets, the commandments of God and all. Jesus came to the world to fulfill and complete “the law and the prophets.”

One book I read said that was meant as a warning from Jesus to his followers, not to go all wild and misbehave, just because we are Christians, and God's got our backs. (The Cost of Discipleship, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

No, as my friend Matt puts it, “God is not going to bless disobedience.” (Matt Arni)

And really, God's laws are meant for our own good, and for everyone's good. I know I am big on the Ten Commandments, but they keep us from hurting ourselves and other people. They keep us in the right relationships with God and with people. They make for a better and more orderly society.

Not only that, but elsewhere, Jesus himself simplified those Ten Commandments down into three: love God, love your neighbor, and love yourself. I know that we can remember three.

When it comes right down to it, this world needs us. The world needs Christians. We Christians are called to preserve this world, and give good flavor to it. We are called to bring light, with its guidance and inspiration and clear-sightedness to the world. We are called to live out what our Lord has commanded.

Let's be salty!

Let's be filled with light!

Let's be faithful to our Lord's commands!

The world is depending on us! Amen.

Preached by Reverend Sally J. DeMasters, February 9, 2020.