

Feb. 5, 2023 Mt. 5: 13-20 & Is. 58: 1-9

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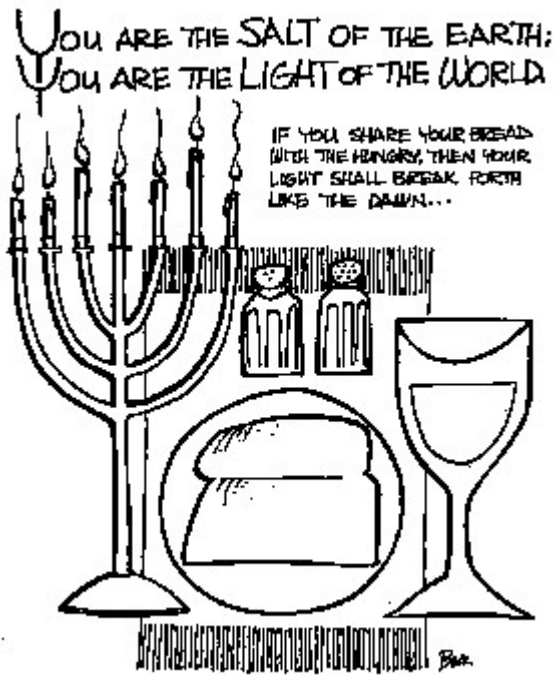
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Link to [Beck](#) (paywall) other [Beck](#)

Stone, Naomi. [Companion of My Heart](#)

Rolheiser, Fr. Ron. [To Live in the Light](#)

[Monastery Sunday Homilies](#) 2/5/17



ENTERING THE SCENE:

Fr. Beck says: “Matthew is specific: “Your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.” Good example and Christian witness help to create an alternative environment, one in which virtuous action is more easily imagined, and more possible. The light gives encouragement, a beacon of reassurance that insists it is worthwhile to do good deeds. Darkness might be thought of as a world in which decency is scorned as wimpy or naïve. The light is the courage to counter a cynical environment. And it feeds courage in turn.” This will be advice that we all need to remember as we engage the challenges of the unfolding year.

Mt. 5:13-20

13 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.

(The Revised Common Lectionary includes the following verses)

17 Do not think that I have come to **abolish** the **Law** or the **Prophets**; I have not come to **abolish** them but to **fulfill** them. 18 I tell you the **truth**, 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**. 19 Anyone who **breaks** one of the **least** of these commandments and **teaches others** to do the same will be called **least** in the **kingdom of heaven**, but whoever **practices** and **teaches** these commands will be called **great** in the **kingdom of heaven**. 20 For I tell you that unless your **righteousness surpasses** that of the **Pharisees** and the **teachers of the law**, you will certainly not enter the **kingdom of heaven**.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: How am I going to be a “light on a stand” in this coming year?

PRAYER: Lord, I often fail to realize that the way I receive and give love is the most effective way to shine light on the truth that God is love, and those who abide in love, abide in God. As you walked among us people experienced that love in life transforming ways; ways so powerful that your very being pointed to God. Then people responded by saying in effect, “if God is like that I can go for that”. Help me do this also, or at least, not get in the way of your light by my choices. Amen.

WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

SALT / SALTINESS / SALTY: In a hot and dry climate salt is essential for life. It is a cleansing agent, preservative, flavor additive and a metaphor for someone who has a zest for life. It was often used as a substitute for money and a sign of welcome and acceptance of a guest. (See diagram of temple below)

Which of these images help you to get the gist of what Jesus was teaching best? How would you try to explain that teaching to someone today? Are you a salty person? Do you know any salty persons?

THROWN / TRAMPLED: When salt became corrupted and unfit for human consumption it was used to de-ice the courtyards of the temple. So even there it had a use.

When you think about it that way, does it change your initial response to this teaching? How?

CITY ON A HILL: Cities were built on hills so that they could more easily be seen and defended when necessary. The early Christians, by the ways that they lived the teachings of Jesus, stood out in like a city built on a hill.

Does your practice of faith make you a ‘city on a hill’ in your environment? Why? If not, why not?

LIGHT / LAMP / SHINE: Lights and lamps shine when lit and put in a place so that their light is available to all.

Does your faith light you up so that others can see what you see? Can you name someone who is a light/lamp of faith for you? What makes them shine?

HIDDEN: If something is hidden, it is so much like all that is around it that it cannot be easily discovered.
Is your faith life so hidden that others would have a hard time identifying you as a person of faith?

FATHER: Jesus was the light that enabled the people to experience God the Father in a very new way. His understanding of God opened the way for all to be included.
Is there anything in this text that enables you to experience God the Father in a new way? What is it? Is there anything in your understanding of God that enables you to exclude anyone?

SEE / PRAISE: Once people began to see God in the way Jesus saw God, their immediate response was to praise God for this wonderful insight.
When was the last time you came to a deeper insight about the God of Jesus? How did you respond to this gift? Has this gift been a light to others? How?

ABOLISH THE LAW / PROPHETS: Up until now, the people had only the law and the prophets for their insights into God's will and purpose. Some were convinced that this was the complete revelation.
If this were the belief of the day, how would some have received Jesus' teachings? Who would have been open to Jesus' new insights? Why?

EVERYONE: By the time this gospel is written, many Gentiles were now members of the Christian community. This caused much confusion for those who thought a person must be a Jew before they could become a Christian.
Are there obstacles in your beliefs that might get in the way of including everyone in God's love today? Can this text help you to remove the obstacle?

TRUTH: Truth is that which reveals the reality of what is.
How do you determine if something is true? Have you ever thought you knew the truth, only to find that you were only just beginning to know its reality? How did this help you to enlarge your understanding, and become a more understanding person?

FULFILL / EVERYTHING IS ACCOMPLISHED: Jesus reassures those who have put their trust in the law and the prophets, that they need not be afraid. He is not doing away with the basic truth in these revelation sources, he is only asking them to dig deeper into the realities they contain.
How does scripture study help you to dig deeper into God's ongoing revelation in your life? Has this process made you a more salty person?

HEAVEN AND EARTH DISAPPEAR: Many in Jesus' day thought the end of the world was at hand. We have people today who once again feel the same.
How does this thinking affect the decisions a person makes? Who would Jesus leave behind?

SMALLEST LETTER / LEAST STROKE: It was considered a grave offense to alter the written word of God in any way. Yet people accused Jesus of doing just that with his teachings.
Can you see why they would think that way? When was the last time you struggled with someone's understanding of a truth, only to find that they simply were seeing things in a much deeper level than you were? Were you able to grow through this experience, or did you get defensive?

BREAKS: To break something or someone is to do grave harm and often make it impossible for it or them to function.
How does your 'breaking' God's laws of love do harm to others, or disable them?

TEACHES OTHERS / PRACTICES: When we make choices, those around us observe our lives. They see what practices we have and make decisions based on what they learn from us.
How is Jesus helping the people to make their choices and decide on what practices they will put in place in their lives? Who are your models, and what have you learned from them? Are you a model for others? What are they learning from your practices?

LEAST / GREAT: What does God want and how am I to respond to God's initiative? There were many competing answers to this eternal question available in Jesus' day.
How does this text help to answer the question when it talks about the least and great of the law?

KINGDOM OF HEAVEN: The kingdom of heaven is that reality where God's will is done and God's people enjoy the full presence of God.
How do you explain to yourself and others what the kingdom of heaven is like?

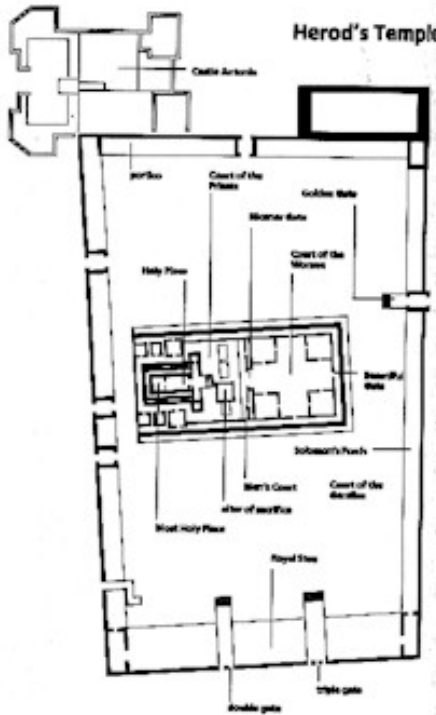
PHARISEES / TEACHERS OF THE LAW: These two groups of people were the religious and moral guides of their day. They attempted to live lives of strict obedience to the received wisdom of their scriptures and traditions.
Who are the examples of these groups today?

RIGHTEOUS SURPASSES: Jesus knew that the scribes and Pharisees were zealous about their religious practices, but that they were stuck obeying the letter of the law, which often found them disobeying the spirit of the law. In his teachings and examples, he showed that the faithfulness to the spirit of the law surpassed all else.

Can you give an example of such a situation that you might be in today? Have you ever had to decide in favor for the spirit of the law over the letter of the law? Have you ever connected that decision with this text before?

PARALLEL TEXTS: Mt. 5:13 // Mk. 9:49; Lk. 14:34f; Mt. 5:14 // Jn. 8:12; Mt. 5:15 // Mk. 4:21; Lk. 8:16; 11:33; Mt. 5:16 // James 3:21; Mt. 5:17 // Rom. 3:31; Mt. 5:18 // Lk. 16:17; Mt. 5:19 // James 2:10; Mt. 5:20 // Rom 10:3;

OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK: Is. 58: 7-10; Ps. 112: 4-9; 1 Cor. 2:1-5; Mt. 5: 13-16
Revised Common Lectionary: Is. 58:1-12; Ps. 112: 1-10; 1 Cor. 2:1-16; Mt. 5:13-20;



SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION: Inside the courtyard of the Temple there were four rooms: one for wood for sacrifice, one where those performing vows could stay for quietness and separation, one where instruction could be received and questions asked, and one where salt was stored to spread on the slippery marble courtyards during wet weather.

[Oxyrhynchus Papyrus](#) 1, Logion 7= Jesus says, "A city built on the top of a high hill and established can neither fall nor be hidden." (v.14)
[v.17] [Gospel of the Ebionites](#), (in Epiphanius, Against Heresies, XXX.16.5) "I have come to destroy sacrifices; and if you do not stop making sacrifices, the wrath (of God) will not leave you."

Gospel of Thomas: Saying 32: "Jesus said, "A city being built and fortified upon a high mountain cannot fall, nor can it be hidden."

Pliny, Nat. Hist. 31:102; "nothing is more useful than salt or sunshine."

Sr. Marlene Halpin, OP in her book [Leading Prayer: Plain and Simple](#), invites us to use our imaginations when we encounter teachings that call us to wonder what Jesus meant by using symbols such as salt and light. She challenges us to use both our imagination and our reasoning abilities to go deeper into the meanings of his teachings. She suggests that our imaginations are faster than any computer. It puts together, in a flash, all the experiences we have had that can help us to stand under the new situation. This will help us to understand what the text is bringing to us today. We even say; "I get the picture". Scripture study should strengthen our imagination 'muscles', and thereby give us God's inspiration. Halpin, Marlene, Dominican. [Leading Prayer: Plain and Simple](#). Dubuque, IA. Brown Pub. 1990. Pages 53ff.

For seekers and believers, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. For the self-satisfied and non-believers, there is a tunnel at the end of the light. Dr. David Hirstius

There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it. - Edith Wharton

"We are only the light bulbs, and our job is just to remain screwed in!" Desmond Tutu

If you have a light, and the whole world should come to you in order to take light from it—the light itself does not diminish—and yet each person has it all. St. Catherine of Siena

"If you have knowledge, let others light their candles in it." -Margaret Fuller

"It seems a natural thing to do in loss and grief, to light even a single candle. I had done so many times throughout the year. A miraculous glow spreads around that flame. It may shine in a chapel, where people leave their silent prayers burning at the feet of the saint, or simply on a windowsill at home. This must be an old, old desire in us--a necessity in us--to see the surprising power in one small flame of light to dispel the dark." —Barbara Helen Berger from AN OFFERING OF FLAMES: Lighting a candle, we light the world.

If we look deeply and carefully within all that is hurtful, ignorant, and wounded, we will eventually see the light of the world shine through. When Jesus says "You are the light of the world" he is reaffirming this persistent luminosity, our hidden wholeness. As children of a good and whole creation, we remain whole and good in spite of all our sorrows, sins, and weaknesses.

Muller, Wayne. [Sabbath: Restoring the Sacred Rhythm of Rest](#). NY. Bantam Books, 1999. Page 42.

For Matthew, the entire Jewish Law needs to be kept, down to the smallest letter. The Pharisees, in fact, are blamed not for keeping the law but for not keeping it well enough. Pg. 99. Ehrman, Bart D. [Lost Christianities](#). NY. Oxford Univ. Press. 2003

In the [gospel of Thomas](#) we find: v 35; He said to them, 'whoever has ears, let him hear. There is light with a man of light, and he lights up the whole world. If he does not shine, he is darkness.' Pg. 112.

Barrett, C. K. [The New Testament Background: Selected Documents](#). San Francisco. Harper & Row. 1989.

In a text acquired in 1967 from a Dutch antiquities dealer now housed in the Berlin Egyptian Museum, there is this quote from a Coptic sermon with excerpts from the gospels. It came to be called the "[Gospel of the Savior](#)". In 97:19-22 we find: "You are the salt of the earth; you are the lamp that illuminates the world". The article by Charles W. Hedrick titled, "The 34 Gospels: Diversity and Division among the Earliest Christians"- Bible Review, June 2002, Pgs 20ff. In it you will find other examples of sayings of Jesus not found in the four gospels.

Holiness, then, does not contradict presence, for difference identification. Rather, the church proves its holiness and difference because its cruciform and Easter Sunday willingness to abandon its own identity and be identified with others shames the worldly ego which stands upon its pride, preserves and preens its own identity, and in Adam-like pretended innocence refuses to be numbered like Christ among the transgressors and the damned. This is the church which conceals itself in a worldly incognito actually the unseen salt of the earth; and in being so is curiously manifested, illumined, and distinguished as the very light of the world, set upon a hill.

Lewis, Alan E. [Between Cross and Resurrection](#). Grand Rapids, MI. Eerdmans. 2001. Pgs. 372-3.



Many personalities have been stunted and twisted from trying to live in conformity with law without love... People whose practices were determined by law from outside had no reference point when they were offered general guidelines of freedom of conscience in making decisions about matters for which previously they were given detailed directions. For others, if the law was not there or was indefinite, the obligation did not exist. Jesus meant his followers to be wiser, deeper and more loving than this, He said, "For I tell you, if your virtue goes no deeper than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven". The kingdom is within and its nature will shine out in the actions which come from its life-source. Pgs. 66-7

Heaps, John. [A Love That Dares to Question: A Bishop Challenges His Church](#). Grand Rapids, MI. Eerdmans Pub. Co. 1998.

It is so important to come to that point in our own spiritual evolution where we are finally ready and willing to be wholeheartedly accountable for ourselves—for who we are and how we are. Heroically, we must be ready to accept unconditional responsibility for the seen and unseen consequences of everything that has ever happened to us.~ Andrew Cohen

Let your light shine—whether you're a candle in a corner or a lighthouse on a hill.

Often we want to be able to see into the future. We say, "How will next year be for me? Where will I be five or ten years from now?" There are no answers to these questions. Mostly we have just enough light to see the next step: what we have to do in the coming hour or the following day. The art of living is to enjoy what we can see and not complain about what remains in the dark. When we are able to take the next step with the trust that we will have enough light for the step that follows, we can walk through life with joy and be surprised at how far we go. Let's rejoice in the little light we carry and not ask for the great beam that would take all shadows away. Henri Nouwen

In the midst of our dark and foggy times, all sorts of voices are shouting orders into the night, telling us what to do, how to adjust our lives. Out of the darkness, one voice signals something quite opposite to the rest - something almost absurd. But the voice happens to be the Light of the World, and we ignore it at our peril. - Paul Aiello, Jr.

Since he is the Sun of Justice, he fittingly calls his disciples the light of the world. The reason for this is that through them, as through shining rays he has poured out the light of the knowledge of himself upon the entire world. For by manifesting the light of truth, they have dispelled the darkness of error from the hearts of people. St. Chromaticus of Aquileia

Deep in their roots all flowers keep the light.—Theodore Roethke

SUGGESTED READINGS:

Links to all the books mentioned in this guide are on The Ark web site: www.theark1.com

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle A 2014. Pgs.51-54. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](#)