

Be Salty (#5 in Be Attitudes Series) **Matthew 5:13-16; 13:33**  
Saint Marks United Methodist Church, Charleston, WV **5<sup>th</sup> Sunday After the Epiphany**  
(February 5,) 2017

Matthew 5: 13-16; 13:33 (CEB)

**5:13** “You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its saltiness, how will it become salty again? It’s good for nothing except to be thrown away and trampled under people’s feet. **14** You are the light of the world. A city on top of a hill can’t be hidden. **15** Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they put it on top of a lampstand, and it shines on all who are in the house. **16** In the same way, let your light shine before people, so they can see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven.

**13:33** “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast, which a woman took and hid in a bushel of wheat flour until the yeast had worked its way through all the dough.”

Today, in our series on “BE” attitudes, we will begin to merge the functions of BE and DO.

Most 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans focus much more attention on what we do, rather than what we BE, what we ARE. We are an action people. As a result much preaching tends to focus on what we DO. It turns into MORALITY preaching. Indeed, most preaching that I encounter focuses on what we DO or what we BELIEVE. We seem to have forgotten about going to SCRIPTURE as an **ENCOUNTER PLACE, where we MEET GOD.**

When we ENCOUNTER GOD in the SCRIPTURE, **then** it changes what we DO. The disciples of Jesus, the ambassador of the Kingdom of Heaven, lives a life of blending BE and DO. It’s a life of melodic *Do-Be-Do-Be-Do.*

When we skip over the ENCOUNTER, when we bypass the BEing and jump straight into the DOing only, our lives are pretty much **DO-DO.** And that explains why so many people feel like **DO-DO.**

Jesus, we have learned in this sermon series on **BEing**, is teaching His disciples and us about **THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND.** It’s **NOT** about pie-in-the-sky-in-the-sweet-bye-and-bye. It’s **NOT** about buying fire insurance for after you die. Jesus began his public preaching, we learned, with the **THEME OF HIS LIFE, TEACHING, AND MISSION: TURN AROUND: THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND.**

In today’s installment of “Kingdom at Hand Being and Living,” Jesus gives us **three examples** of what the **Kingdom of Heaven** is about:

- Salt**
- Light**

□ Yeast (or in older translations: “Leaven”)

Many of you may have noticed that I often use these three characteristics as referring to what is our essential character as Citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven at Hand: **Salt, Light, Leaven.**

Some of you noticed that I was not here last Sunday. I have been sick since Saturday a week ago. I'm not used to being horizontal for that long at a time. I have felt like I was in a CNN/FoxNews/NBC/CBS/ABC cavern from which I could not escape. Perhaps that will explain some of the descriptions in this sermon.

Many of us would like to have the power – **with the mere signature of our name – to be able to shut down our borders, to instantly invalidate the visas of somewhere between 109 and 60,000 people.** *(I am trying my best to not wax political here, because I truly believe that the teaching of Jesus is far more important than the momentary infatuation with current events. I'm not saying that what is going on in the news is unimportant. I am, HOWEVER, SAYING THAT THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS MORE IMPORTANT. And I don't want anyone here distracted from the TEACHING of Jesus, because you think that I am, or am not, on the same side of the political fence as you.)*

Many folks long for a day, long since gone, when the Church was at the center of everything. People did not have soccer practice during church worship times. People did not have to choose between Church activities and other social or community activities. People did not have to think twice about saying “Merry Christmas,” because we assumed that everyone was Christian.

These are the days of CHRISTENDOM, from which we have been moving away since the late 1950's. In the days of CHRISTENDOM, the Church was assumed to be in charge, to be at the center of everything. Some people would love to return to those days ... because it was so easy. It was nice when we had that perceived power. It felt good to be in charge.

**Well, my sisters and brothers those days are gone.** It was **certainly not that way** in Jesus' time, **nor for the first three centuries of the life of the Christian Church.** And **THAT** kind of power is **NOT** what Jesus was talking about how the Kingdom of Heaven operated. That was – to put it bluntly – POWER OVER. BUT the Kingdom of Heaven's power works like

- Salt
- Light
- Yeast (or in older translations: “Leaven”) ... power from the inside out

It was power from within. Jesus NEVER [... let me spell that out ...] **N-E-V-E-R** described in His teaching that the Kingdom of Heaven at hand works as POWER OVER.

- Power from within – YES.
- Power that is chosen as one’s authority for living – YES.
- Em-Power-ment of – YES.
- Involuntary Power OVER – NO!.

You see we want to be able to wave a wand and make it happen, Right? – you’re thinking of **Harry Potter** and the place called **HOGWARTS**, not the Kingdom of Heaven.

- Salt
- Light
- Yeast (/ “Leaven”)

But WHEN it is **CHOSEN**, it is oh so powerful. Do you remember the difference that a wee bit of yeast made in the loaves of bread that I showed the children, in the children’s sermon.<sup>1</sup> People of Jesus’ day would understand that, easily. They made their own bread – not pick it up off the shelf at Kroger’s.

Another thing that they would have understood would have been the use of **SALT**.

In Jesus’ day, each Galilean village had a community clay oven. I’m told they are still there today. The fuel used in Jesus’ day was something more plentiful than the scarce wood supply. It was the droppings of camels and donkeys. One of the duties of each young Palestinian girl was to learn how to collect this animal excrement, MIX SALT in it, and mold the donkey and camel dung into patties to be left out in the sun to dry. Even today, these dung patties are still used as fuel in third world countries.

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<sup>1</sup> Two loaves of homemade bread were shown to the children. Their ingredients and preparation were identical, except the shrunken little loaf did not have 1-1/2 teaspoons of yeast.

A slab of salt was placed at the base of the oven, and the salted dung patty would be placed on that slab. Salt has chemical ENZYME properties which cause the dung patties to burn. The salt was necessary for combustion.

Over time, the salt loses this enzyme property and becomes useless.

The New Testament was written in Greek, but the language Jesus spoke was Aramaic. In Aramaic, the word translated into our Gospel lesson today as “earth” can also be translated as “clay oven.” Ergo: “You are the salt of the earth” = “You are the salt of the clay oven.”

When Jesus talks about “If salt has lost its saltiness,” we today understand a quality that gives a McDonald French Fry its special flavor. Or, likewise for watermelon, chili, etc. Not so for those who were thinking in terms of the “saltiness” of the clay oven.

- To be SALT as an enzyme means **CAUSES THINGS TO HAPPEN.**
- To be SALT as an enzyme means **THE REFUSE/DUNG OF LIFE CAN BE USEFUL.**
- To be SALT as an enzyme means **THE DUNG SITUATIONS OF LIFE CAN INDEED BE SOMETHING IMPORTANT AND VITAL.**

That’s what we Christians are called to do: **as Resurrection people, we are to take dead end situations and allow God’s power working through us to transform them.**

How can WE be **salt** in our world today? How can we be **light**? How can we be **yeast**?

**W A I T F O R A N S W E R S .**

Alright, you are not used to sermons being a give-and-take conversation. I get that. BUT I am not going to give you the answers. You get to do this as a HOMEWORK assignment. (Uh Oh! Nobody ever complains when Janet and I give the children a homework assignment. Have I gone from preaching to meddling?)

I know that many of you have seen the Kingdom of Heaven breaking forth in little ways every day. I’m confident that many of you have also been ambassadors of the Kingdom of Heaven in little ways, many days. We’ve seen it but WE’RE NOT IN THE HABIT OF PAYING ATTENTION TO IT.

Sooooo. Here’s where the baggie comes in that the ushers gave to each person when they arrived today. (Is there anyone who does not have one? Ushers please give a bag to each person whose hand is raised. Thank you.)

LITURGY – it's what we call the different acts of worship. It literally means "THE WORK OF THE PEOPLE." Your Homework is to do some LITURGY this coming week. Don't leave home without your bag of salt. Each bag has ten individual packages of salt.

Every time you see someone (including yourself) do an Act of **Kindness**, an Act of **Empowerment**, an Act of **Mercy**, an Act of **Justice**, an Act of **Compassion**, I want you to stop. Stop whatever you are doing (unless you are driving a car, or walking across an intersection, etc.) ... Stop and say to yourself: **That was an Act of the Kingdom of Heaven, right here at hand.** (You can say it aloud or silently, as you choose.) Then take a package of salt and tear it open and pour out the salt. If it's outside, it's easy. If you are inside a building, pour it out in a safe manner. But **make it a liturgical act, an act of worship.** **PAY ATTENTION.**

I can guarantee you that if you pay attention, and do what I'm instructing you ... then ... No, I'm not going to tell you what I guarantee. You will tell me next week what the impact is. Keep a mental or written record of each Act of the Kingdom of Heaven you witnessed that caused you to liturgically pour out the Salt. Next week, you're going to share your Homework assignment.

Know this much. Something **WILL** happen to you, if you pay attention and find ten inbreakings of the Kingdom of Heaven. And if someone sees you and asks you what you are doing, go ahead and tell them.

**NOTHING is more powerful than the Kingdom of Heaven at hand.** And yet, it does **not overpower**, does **not force people into doing what they don't want to do.** Just like God's LOVE it is **always voluntarily** received, accepted and participated in. But don't be surprised by how powerful it is.

- YOU**, my sisters and brothers are the **light of the world.**
- YOU**, my sisters and brothers are the **salt of the clay oven.**
- YOU**, my sisters and brothers are the **yeast of "powerful things at work."**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.