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“Salty and Lit Up Christians”

Isaiah 58:3-9a
Matthew 5:13-16

Since the beginning of our Judaeo-Christian tradition with the Patriarch Abraham, one of the greatest threats to our faith has been the culture in which it exists. Throughout the biblical record we see examples of how the customs, ideas, and accepted values of the society threaten to weaken and dilute the message of God to his people. This continued after the Bible was written into the ages of Christianity, and it still exists today. In this country, we are prone to pay more attention to our cultural religion than to the faith of Jesus Christ. Have we not all worshiped at the altars of material success, national might, and technological wisdom? We have been duped into thinking that might makes right, that wealth brings happiness, and that science can solve all our problems. But the message of the prophet Isaiah really calls us to examine our faith and our religious activities and to see if they are in line with what God says.

If we will read our Bibles and take seriously the words therein, we will see that God doesn't call us to worldly wealth, or earthly strength, or even to human knowledge. God calls us to radical righteousness based only upon his designs for how we ought to live in relationship with our fellow humans and with God.

The prophets of the Old Testament always called the people to practice true religion and not merely to put on a show. In today's lection, Isaiah tells the Israelites that their religious fast is no good if it does not lead them to seek a better relationship with God and to live in harmony with each other. Just going through the motions of some religious observance without the right spirit and attitude is meaningless. But when our religion and its rites of worship lead us to stop evil and to bring in liberation, to share food with the hungry, and to reach out to the poor, then our light will break forth and our healing will come. Then the Lord will answer us.

Isaiah promises that if we pray in the right spirit, with openness to God, he will answer us. Furthermore, God's best answer is, "Here I am." It is required, however, that we be truly seeking God by living right, which includes refraining from evil and seeking good. God will then grant us his presence, which is the greatest good. There is no guarantee that God will grant every whim we ask for, but true prayer leads us to peace and joy even in difficult circumstances, for we come to know that God is with us, and that is what is most important.

Godly wisdom and power are in the Cross of Jesus Christ, and we are to try and follow the example of our Lord, who showed

us that the utmost power and wisdom are found in self-giving love that seeks to redeem instead of striking back.

Your faith should not rest in the wisdom of humanity, but in the power of God. We want to explain and understand all things—that is part of our pride in human knowledge. Yet it always falls short. We do not reach God and know God by intellect alone. There will always be unanswered questions and problems we don't understand. It is folly to seek a reasonable explanation for everything. But when we plug in to the power of God and seek him with heart and spirit as well as mind, we will find assurance and peace that transcends human knowledge.

I am sure that through faith in Jesus Christ and through trust in God and through reliance on the Holy Spirit, you and I can know and believe all that is necessary for our own salvation. It is the Spirit of God who reveals to us the wisdom of God and who supplies us with the power of God.

When Jesus tells us that we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world, he knows that we get our saltiness and our illumination from God. Jesus came to earth to bring light to us; he came to bring the flavor of God to humankind. After his ascension back into heaven, Jesus Christ sends the Holy Spirit to continue to supply us with salt, with light, and with every good gift. All that we are expected to do is to plug in to the infinite power of God.

If we receive saltiness from our Lord, then we will flavor the earth. If we have been illuminated by God's light, then we will shine unto the world. It is not through lofty words and wise speeches that we accomplish our mission in the world. Rather, as we live each day as people who understand that life is a gift and should be lived to the glory of God, we show forth our faith. The person who goes about with grasping greed, with selfish concern, and with no thought for anyone else gives no good flavor to the world. But the person who seeks to lend a hand, to say a kind word, and to share something with another is letting light shine. There is plenty of darkness in this world, but how much darker would be some illness, or a death, or any problem, if no one else was around to care, to love, and to support us in our travail? By plugging in to God's power, we become the light of a city set on a hill, proclaiming to all that there is peace and refreshment in that city from the dark night of loneliness, fear, and despair. Our purpose for this is that persons be blessed by good works and that God be glorified.

Today you and I have the opportunity to gather at our Lord's Table to partake of the Holy Communion. This can be a meaningless rite if we come with cold, closed hearts, or it can be an infusion of God's grace if we come seeking the presence of our Living Lord. Come today in faith. Leave all selfishness,

worldliness, and pride behind. Come seeking only God, and you will be filled. God's supply of power and love and grace is limitless, and he freely gives to all who seek. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.