

The Rev. Charlie Holt

The lowest place on the planet is actually in the nation of Israel. The region there called the Dead Sea and I've been there a couple of times. And it is it is dead there. Nothing grows around there. And the reason why is because water goes into the sea, the Dead Sea, and it doesn't have any outlet to go out of the Dead Sea other than by evaporation.

And so all the water from the Jordan River and any rain runoff that might come out of the mountains and hills around the region, all flow into the Dead Sea and over the millennia, what has happened as all of that evaporation has happened, is all of the minerals in that water have crystallized and become very concentrated. And so, the Dead Sea is very, very salty.

And it's actually if you were to go out and taste the Atlantic Ocean and how salty the Atlantic Ocean is, anybody ever drank the Atlantic Ocean here? Around here? It's actually kind of salty in the Saint Johns River right here. So. But in the Atlantic Ocean is, is one level of saltiness. The Dead Sea is ten times the level of saltiness of the Atlantic Ocean.

And so when Jesus is using this imagery or metaphor of salt, it is something that is, well, well known in that area. This is a region that is known for its salts. And so one of the things that the Dead Sea salts were used for was, was preserving and tanning things. It was it was, a useful, preservative to keep things from rotting and decaying.

And so they would use it in some of the industries. It was also used for healing. There were, bathing that would use the Dead Sea salts. And even to this day, you can go to Dead Sea salt spas and go, get, enriched. I was talking to somebody today that was showing me a wound on her hand that she said was healed from, soaking it in the dead Sea for a whole year.

It was without pain or problems, because of the experience of that, if you were to ingest the Dead Sea water, it would actually poison you. And yet we go and swim there. When we go, people go and float around in the Dead Sea. I saved one of our parishioners, at Saint John the Divine, when we went on a pilgrimage.

And she was. You're very buoyant. And the Dead Sea. And they teach you exactly how you're supposed to float on your back. And she started to go, like, move. And I paddled over to her and righted the ship and saved her life. She'll forever be grateful to me for that. The, What? Jesus. What would happen with that particular salt?

And this was true of all the salts of that day, even the ones that she would use on food, which probably come more out of the Mediterranean Sea, was you would take, that salt and it was never pure. It was never pure sodium chloride, which is what pure salt is. It would all it would have all kinds of other minerals and gypsum and other, other minerals.

And when that salt would get moist and, and interact with water, the sodium chloride would dilute out of it and it would lose its saltiness. And, and it would just simply actually become residue, which was, would just be thrown on a, on a road. It was it was no longer useful for all the different uses of the salt.

And that's true not just of the, of the Dead Sea salt, but also the Mediterranean salt. It would have a residue. And after the moisture would hit it, it would lose its salty properties of the sodium chloride. And it would just be dust and you could throw it on the road. And that's what Jesus is saying about our Christian life, is that when we are living the authentic path or calling of a disciple, there is something about our lives that will function in the same way that salt functions.

It will be a preservative in the culture. And one of the problems with salt and salty discipleship is the culture does not take it very well. In many ways. There will be something about Christians that will not, unlike salt in a wound, will sting a little bit when it comes to the ways of this world and the culture around us.

And so there's a bit of a pressure on the Christian disciple to do what Jesus is saying, to lose our saltiness. And, and one way that we lose our, our usefulness or potency is salt is to not allow the salt to touch the culture. And so one temptation of Christians is to actually pull into a holy huddle and, and withdraw from the aspects of society and just give them over to various things.

I had a friend of mine named Dallas Davis who was a, he's I used to work out with him, but he was also a movie producer. And as one of his visions as a as a movie producer was to enter into the entertainment industry, which in his mind was very worldly and corrupt and produce movies that would be a Christian testimony and witness.

So he was trying to be salt in an industry that that had a level of corruption and to and to be an influence. And this is part of the calling of Christians, isn't it? We need Christians who are in the judiciary and in politics and in the legal profession. And for my family, car washes or whatever it is.

And, and, this is this is our role and society is to allow our Christian witness to, to influence the culture so that it doesn't rot and decay and become corrupt. Some of our cultural commentators reflecting on the Christian church and sometimes churches can end up looking a lot like the culture where you have sort of a progressive, the Democrat churches where the it's the Democrats at prayer, and then you have the Republican churches, which are all the Republicans at prayer.

I'm not going to tell you which way I think Saint Mark's is going, but, but we sometimes think of Christianity that way. And what I would suggest to you is that there are no Republican and Democratic parties in Christianity, but there's only one party, and that's the kingdom of God. And the degree to which our churches are reflective of the ideologies of our culture in our age might actually say something about the degree to which we have lost our saltiness.

Right. That if we are progressive Christians or conservative Christians, or however we want to think about ourselves in that way, what it may be saying is that we have really diluted our faith and become somewhat useless to the testimony of Christianity in a culture that needs us to challenge all of the aspects of the culture.

I had a, a man that was a member of, not this church, but one of my other churches that I was a pastor at, and he explained to me the way he bifurcated his life. He says, when I'm at church, I try to be very Christian, and I'm following all the ways of God. And I very devoted and into the Bible and so on.

But when I'm at work, I have to live a different way. I have to, I have I can't get away with being Christian in my work. I was kind of curious what he did for a living, that he said that that was the case, but he said it just won't work. And in my in my work environment, I have to be worldly, I have to I have to be more cutthroat and do that.

And I, I challenged him, I said, I don't think that's what Jesus is calling you to be, to have a, a private devotional life on one side and not let that Christian faith translate into the way that you live your life in the world. A lot of what salt and light is all about is being in the world and not of the world.

It's a famous saying that similar to something Paul said, Corinthians, that we need to, be engaged with the culture in the workplace and, and in the politics or wherever it is that the social spheres of the, the clubs and so on. We need to be out there in the world. But there must be something distinctive about us as Christians that that the world takes note of.

Because when we're living the Christian life authentically in the world, but not of the world, Jesus says, you will be a city on the hill. You will be the light of the world where we're a city on a hill. You can't miss it. They will see the community of the people of Saint Mark's who are manifesting a love for one another and, holiness of life and a faithfulness to the scriptures and a desire to live.

And as people who are forgiven and offering grace to one another and also honest about our sins and so on, that we're living the authentic Christian life, so much so that the people of the city of Jacksonville will go, wow, those people at Saint Mark's, they're really different. They're bright and shiny. There's something that's a little salty about them, but they're also really attractive, and I'm interested in who they are and what they're doing and what kind of people and what kind of community that is.

This is Jesus's vision for his church and his disciples. Is that we wouldn't take our light and our testimony and just keep it private, but we would let our light shine. You know, this song right there, this little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine. You know, let's sing along. This little light of mine.

I'm going to let it shine. This little light of mine. I'm going to let it shine. Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine. Hide it under a bushel. No. Oh!

Better stop. Start the hand motions. Things go off the rails. I'm going to let it shine. That's the, that's our calling is to be the light in the world. To be the salt. Now, what's the activating agent? Well, it's the third part of the verse from the gospel is the scriptures. What teaches us what, holds us accountable to not simply compromise with the culture.

It's the truth of God's Word. And Jesus says, I didn't come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it. He says, every single word in here. More than that, he says every dot, every jot and tittle, every little dash on the T, every dot on every eye is relevant to our lives and important for us to know and to see realized in our witness to the Lord.

You know, I ask you evaluative question how well do you know the Bible? Have you have you read the whole thing? Do you have you and the word of one of our colleagues, have you read, Mark learned and inwardly digested it to where, you know, the big story of the scriptures and how your story of your life fits into it?

Because what Jesus says is, I have come to fulfill it.

And I'm going to fulfill all of it. And so it's so critically important for us if we are to be the salt and to be the light of the world, to allow this, to have our lives conform to it so that we can be the transformational salt and light that the world desperately needs. I, I get inspired by people who are missionaries in other places, and I want to invite a missionary to come up here.

The we every now and then, people come and stay with us. We have a hotel. Halt is what we call it. There's a lot of guest rooms, and this is one of my daughter's friends who is a missionary in India. She's lived there for the last four years. She went to seminary with my daughter. Name's Gloria Roy.

And I tell us a little bit about your ministry and what you do. Yeah, we're just really convicted by being light and salt in the world. And a way that we can participate in the life of our community is to engage in redemptive businesses. And so we're starting a music academy in order to bring education and arts and hospitality in our community.

Through this redemptive business enterprise. And you had, shared with us at dinner about the climate of persecution in India and what you're seeing with that. Would you talk a little bit about that? Absolutely. India is politically, in the last decade, we've been continuing to move into a more Hindu nationalistic nation. And so we've had a lot of persecution against Christian organizations.

And so we've lost a lot of funding into nonprofit organizations like Compassionate International is no longer able to function in India. And so all the wonderful work that these organizations had done in terms of feeding the poor, and bringing in resources for them is now a question that the church in India is trying to answer. How do we continue to function in our community with integrity, and live in this current political climate and still continue to be salt and light in creative ways that God is opening our eyes to?

Yeah. And so, persecution is a very real thing for being a missionary where you are, how to tell a little bit about the example you shared with me of your church and the and the, the young person that tell that story. That's. Yeah, absolutely. So we've noticed that something that we can move towards is through a lot of relationships and evangelism, through our friendships.

And so as we encounter people who have not known of the unconditional love of God, simply telling them that there's a God who loves you unconditionally doesn't give them any context to experience and have a knowledge of what that might mean. And so we're really convicted that God has called us to be that person of experience in their lives, that they should experience God's unconditional love through our relationship, so that as we talk about the love of God for them, that they know it and have a context to put it into.

And so through this way, we've been able to read the Bible with people who have never encountered the love of Jesus before. And through reading the book of Mark, actually, they have fallen in love with the person of Jesus and walking with them through the Bible for a year,

their eyes were opened to the truth that God is a loving God for them and that he is the one true God.

That's wonderful. I mean, I, am so impressed by you and your witness and testimony and India, it's very inspirational to us to hear, somebody that's living the salt in life, light life and, a place that is kind of hard. I mean, I think one of the things that is what Jesus is saying to us is persecution is actually not the main problem.

Our main problem is dilution, that we would, that we would diminish our testimony and witness by not, being willing to stand up for our faith. So thank you for being a witness. Yeah, I appreciate it. Gloria. Let me pray for you. Yeah. Heavenly father, we thank you so much for the testimony and witness of those who take the gospel to places that are tough and challenging to take, and especially for Gloria and her family, who are bearing witness to your name through ministries of dance and our music and, and arts, to help use that, to lead others through lifestyle evangelism.

We thank you so much for her faith and pray for protection and provision. In Jesus name, Amen. Yeah. Thank you, Gloria. And, you know, I love, that she was willing to share. And I put her on the spot last night and asked her to be a part of my sermon because I thought she was such a good illustration of what it means to be salt and light.

And, the neat thing is, you don't have to go to India in order to be a missionary. You can be missionaries to the city of Jacksonville and the region of Ortega by being, in a sense, the salt and light in our area. So let us pray. Heavenly father, thank you so much for the call that you give us to be, bright and shiny for you and salty, for your kingdom in our context.

And so please empower us with your with your grand story of the Holy Scriptures to be the people that you're calling us to be. In the name of your son, Jesus. Amen.