

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany, February 5, 2017
Christ Episcopal Church, La Crosse, Wisconsin
The Very Rev. Canon Patrick P. Augustine, D.Min. D.D., Rector
Matthew 5: 13-20

IMPACT

February 13th TIME magazine has an article “It all looks as if the world is preparing for war” written by Mikhail Gorbachev, former leader of the Soviet Union. Terrorism and wars have created such chaos that millions of refugees are seeking a home. He writes:

The current situation is too dangerous. More troops, tanks and armored personnel carriers are being brought to Europe. While state budgets are struggling to find people’s essential social needs, military spending is growing. It all looks as if the world is preparing for war.” Wow! We live in a complex and difficult world.¹

Jesus people also faced a dark world. There was oppression from Rome and religious divisions among Pharisees and Seduces. High Priest collaborated with Roman. Revolutionary Zealots plotted to free their homeland. Women had no rights and the poor were simply ignored. Gentiles were considered forgotten people by God; they were destined to burn in hell. It all looked as if the world was ready to collapse. Into that sort of situation Jesus of Nazareth appears on the scene to inject hope to proclaim the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Jesus calls his followers:

“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 underfoot.

“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 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. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven (Matthew 5: 13-16).

Jesus is calling his own Hebrew people of his day to be the true Israel that God called to be the light of the world (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6). In other words,

¹ TIME, p. 22.

Jesus calls his church to be people who will make an impact in their society; they will be the peacemakers, reconcilers, healers, and can be the voice of the poor. The church is called to the unique task of shaping people to be servants and agents of light and life in a decaying world. We as followers of Jesus are not a political organization nor a social club, but a community that lives in service to others. We are called to serve people according to the purposes of God. Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan how to deal with their neighbors and welcome the stranger among them.

The Gospel presents to us a God who takes the initiative with human beings, and does not merely sit back, waiting to be discovered. He takes the initiative of radical love, sending His own son to be born among us. He calls His church to the serious practice of Christian living through such simple things as hospitality, spiritual housekeeping, Bible study, worship and praise. These spiritual practices heal our souls and give us vision and energy beyond dogma and political beliefs --- something beyond theological and political cultural wars. Salt, yeast, light, a little city set on a hill in a dark night, a small seed: these are the metaphors that belong to our charter, our calling to be the disciples of Jesus. We are called to carry our impact in our society and the world.

Most people I know are impressed by many people that impact them in their lives. I find that sad. There are number of ways that we can purposefully impact our society. One great way for us is to have a message that the doors of this house of worship are open to all God's children. Christians, Muslims, agonistics, citizens, refugees, poor and the wealthy; all are welcome. By giving our time, passion and resources we are showing love for our neighbors as a children of God.

Last Thursday as I came down from church to my office after service of the Holy Eucharist, I met a black man outside of my office. We had helped this man earlier to buy bus tokens. Jackie, our new parish secretary, had given him a bar of soap and towel to take a shower in the undercroft. He told me that he has found a job and was here to thank us.

There are small ways you can impact people's lives. There are many ways you can become helpful as God's hands. You can drive someone who doesn't have a car. Taking time to visit people when they are sick truly impacts them. The bonds that are formed by your kind actions last forever. People will speak about the impact you made on them by just visiting them.

"You are the light of the world," Jesus said. We are a noticed and watched people. We carry Jesus' mantle as the people of God empowered and equipped by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Our response to the needs of our world may be small and personal: a cup of cold water, a warm blanket, or a visit with cookies and Eucharist. Or, we may be bold: "Rise up and walk," or expel evil spirits in the name of Jesus. Whatever our response may be, it brings wholeness and dignity to the world. When Church prays and serves in this way, the reign of God intrudes on the life of the world. We serve in Jesus name and announce the Kingdom of God is among us by not becoming bogged down by the chaos and complexities of issues of our world and society. No repressive government, no oppressive social structure, none of the principalities and powers, not even death, can strip us of that power to serve in Jesus name.² "To all who received him, who believed in his name he gave power to become children of God³" to be the light and salt of the earth.

It is Jesus who impacts the people of the church to carry on the ministry to be salt and light in our world where "it all looks as if the world is preparing for war." We are called to be the instruments of peace and harbinger of hope in Jesus name.

Stay salty and be the Light of the world. Alleluia!

² Darrel L. Guder, *Missional Church*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 1998. P.106.

³ John 1:12.

Books used and quoted from for preparation of this sermon:

John Stott, *The Living Church*

N.T. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone, Part one.*

Gabe Lyons, *The Next Christians, How a New Generation is Restoring the Faith*

David L Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, Editors, *Fasting on the Word, Year A, Vol.1.*

Mark Kurlansky, *Salt A World History*