

LOST CAUSE  
[written in oral form]

Isaiah 58:1-9a, Matthew 5:13-20  
5th Sunday after Epiphany, Year A

February 9, 2020  
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I wonder what I was thinking when I came up with the title?

Perhaps, it was democracy in the US.....or... the Middle East & Palestinian situation?  
Maybe it was about resisting populous leaders and nationalism?  
Or, mitigating the climate crisis.....

Or,... was I pondering the Leafs bringing the cup home?  
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I am using both the Matthew and Isaiah passages for today.

The Matthew text is about being the salt and light of the earth, which is a profound and challenging declaration.

Isaiah, in prophet form, criticises the people for just going through the motions. They were obediently checking off their piety do-list.

It was all head stuff. They had determined how to appease God by obeying certain rules. Their duties were mostly painless,.....and without passion. They had it all figured out,.....so they thought.

God berated their superficial, religious drama by stating that God wants true justice and righteous. God desires from the **depth-of-one's-soul-action** that feeds the hungry and takes in the homeless,.... And includes full authenticity. When that happens, then "Your" light will break forth like the dawn".....and you will be in a right relationship with God.

Moreover, When you cry for help, God will say "Here I am."

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Remember that part:...the cry for help. That should be puzzling because if we are in a right relationship with God, we assume all will be well.

Why the need to cry for help?

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Back to Matthew and the salt and light.

This passage did not suddenly appear. It follows the Beatitudes.

This message is for those who perked-up after hearing the beatitudes. It is for those described in the Beatitudes, yet as Paul pointed out last Sunday, much of those conditions listed, are difficult and painful.

And, keep in mind, they are in the present tense!  
**They are NOT ideals; they are realities.**

For you.....who are:  
poor in spirit  
who are mourning  
who are meek  
who hunger and thirst / who are **lacking** righteousness

who are actively being merciful, in spite.....of circumstances.

who are pure of heart..... Yikes, that's a tough one.  
who are peacemakers, and who are being persecuted,.....

You are the salt and the light of the world.

Perplexing?

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Then there is the shocker: if the salt loses its saltiness, it is worthless;  
it is thrown out and trampled.

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Actually, that statement is obvious.

Have you ever tasted salt that has lost its saltiness????

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NO! Because it is **Impossible** for salt not to be salty in taste.

Salt-less / "Un-salt" salt is absurd.

That was the point that Jesus was making when he asked what is done when salt has lost its taste.

If the white crystal in the shaker on the table doesn't taste like salt, THEN IT IS NOT SALT -- It's an imposter / a pretender!

It is worthless for the intended purpose, and worse: it is deceiving / it is a non-truth -- a lie.

So, with that in mind, of course it is tossed aside.

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Since, this was an important concept / lesson.... Jesus repeated it, in a different manner, with a different metaphor.

This time Jesus said, "You are the light of the world."

Jesus went on and said that it would be crazy to try to hide a city on a hill, just as it would be crazy to light a lamp and then hide the light.

Lighted lamps are put out for all to see.

That is the nature / the purpose of a lighted lamp.  
A light does illumination. It would be ridiculous to try to make a light not be a light. It would not make sense to create a light and then try to make it into something it is not.

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Before I continue, notice the context.  
Jesus presented a universal application– to the earth / to the world.

Jesus didn't say you are salt or light only at work or only when you are with your close friends or at home with family.

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Next, Jesus said that we still must adhere to all the commandments,... and more.  
We must do better than the masters of dutiful obedience.  
Our righteousness / the essence of our spirit must prevail / must rise above the fear that causes behavioural compliance.

In the following verses, Jesus even enhanced the expectations.

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This all seems too much,.....even absurd.  
The demand is too high..... We are doomed....  
We are a lost cause.  
The hopeful aspiration for the world is a lost cause.

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Before we give up,.....let us look again at what Jesus said.

We will Remove the metaphors of salt and light.  
Jesus said BE YOU in all situations / everywhere,... even at church.

The point is / the message is BE who /what you are!  
Be honest / be real / be yourself!  
Be Authentic! Be Real!  
Just as salt is salt and a light is a light,... always. Be yourself.

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Recall what we read in Isaiah 58?  
The text was exposing the problem of “pretending” / of putting on a show. They were going through the motions of acting righteous, but it was all fluff.

It is one thing to practice civility / good form, it is quite another to “pretend” to be something we are not. And,.....maybe being something we are not.... has a deeper root, than just trying to fit in or appease.

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There are a number of problems with not being “real”, and the big one is honesty.

Honesty is highly valued in the Bible.  
Truth is found in honesty. **We are found** in honesty, and healthy relationships depend on honesty,..... and this includes with God, too.

And, it includes everyone and everything.... all the earth and the world.

If we do Not face and embrace honest realities we may be tempted to believe the lies of tyrannical leaders, **or**... Neglect and abuse creation,.. the weak, the poor,.....and even ourselves.

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Our faith must Not be merely submission to codes and rules. Our faith must be faith, and NOT precision theology.

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I sometimes wonder if we have lost that deep spiritual trust in God.  
I wonder if we have lost the unexplainable mystical in our living....., that deep down in the soul...Love.  
It is a love that transcends.  
It is love that connects us with God and everything.

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What is the condition of our Spirit,.... of our spiritual relationship with God? ?????

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In honesty,.... IN Honesty... we are the lost cause.

Life is Not a Disney Fairy Tale.

Life is mostly a tragedy,.. full of hardships, sorrow and pain.

When we face and accept that.....we can only / our only real choice for living is crying out to God.  
We Must be honest and authentic. We must live our truth.

Cry out to God,..... and God will respond.

God is with the poor in Spirit.  
God is with those who are mourning  
God is with those who **want to be righteous**  
God is with those doing mercy,.....and so on.

That is the miracle / that is power / the salt and light of the world.  
In spite of being a lost cause.....we continue/ we live / we love.  
We trust God for each and every moment, in spite of our condition.  
Oh,... and what a testimony that is.  
It is life changing.  
In honesty, we will discover love / the Spirit of God.

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Eric Clapton, who is now 74 years old. Is one of the best lead guitarist in the world.  
He had a long, successful career that started in the mid 1960's, and included many hit songs.

His personal life was not so stellar.  
By the early 1980's, drugs and alcohol were consuming him.

In 1984, he cheated on his wife, and from that affair, his daughter Ruth was born. She was kept a secret, and he avoided her.

He was spiralling down. In his autobiography, he wrote:  
In the lowest moments of my life, the only reason I didn't commit suicide was that I knew I wouldn't be able to drink any more if I was dead.

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After another affair, he became divorced. From that affair, his son Conor was born in 1986.

Two years later, Eric became honest with himself, and realized that He was a "lost cause."

Something amazing happened. He discovered love.  
The manifestation was on his son, Conor, but it also included himself.

He stopped drinking and taking drugs, and devoted his passions / his life to his son. He Loved his Son.

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Tragically, in 1991, while in Manhattan, a house cleaner left the window open; it was on the 53rd floor.

Conor, soon to be 5, fell to his death.

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Deep in unbearable grief, Eric Clapton went into isolation.

He was tempted to give up and sedate himself, yet.....that Love that changed his life Did Not Die.

As a balm and testimony, he wrote...with help from Will Jennings,  
Tears in Heaven.

He sang:  
Would you know my name  
If I saw you in heaven?  
Would it be the same  
If I saw you in heaven?  
I must be strong and carry on  
'Cause I know I don't belong here in heaven

And, it ends with:

Time can bring you down, time can bend your knees  
Time can break your heart, have you begging please, begging please

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That love prevailed. He sought out his estranged daughter, Ruth, and they healed thfeir relationship.

He married again in '98, and had three more children.  
Eric is a devoted spouse and father, and ..... he has NOT returned to sedating himself.

Full honesty,.....led to love, and Love changed his life.

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I can NOT differentiate that Love from the Love of God.

Religion did Not transform him. Love did, mystical love, Divine love.

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Sometimes, what feels like the end, may instead be the beginning.

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Consider the Red Army rampaging through Russia, White Russia and Ukraine, after the Great War. From that lost cause, arose the Mennonite Central Committee.

Now, consider all the lives that have been illuminated and enhanced by MCC over the past 100 years. Even in world events, a lost cause may be a new beginning.

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Yes,.....millions were killed in the Soviet Union under Stalin.

Life is a tragedy. There are lost causes,.....

We must find and own that truth, and cry out to God.

Then, we may hear the angels hovering all around singing, Blessed are you. .... Blessed are you. Blessed are you.