

THE GOSPEL OF YOUR LIFE
Sermon for Epiphany 5A-Mt 5:13-20
LPC, 2/5/17

It is said that everybody has a gospel to preach. If you are Facebook friends with my sister, you know what hers is. My sister's gospel, which she will proclaim to anyone who will listen, is that you must do what gives you joy.

A little bit of background may be helpful. At the age of 60 my sister was fired from a lucrative job for which she was well-trained and at which she was good, but which she hated, owing to a poisonous office atmosphere. She was fired by a vindictive boss without a reason given. She was advised that she had grounds for a lawsuit, but she just wanted to put that horrible experience behind her. She decided to pursue her love of dance and become a full-time fitness instructor. She started a business called Colorful Fitness dedicated to "Inspiring joyful mind and body wellness," and became certified in Yoga, Pilates, Line Dancing, Senior Fitness, Ballet, Tap, and Sports Nutrition. She choreographs her own routines. She looks fifteen years younger, and she is having the time of her life.

So, you can understand why if you stand next to her long enough she will preach to you about following what gives you joy. She is a true believer.

My sister has found the gospel of her life. She is fortunate in that regard. She found hers at 60 but some of us who are older than that are still kind of vague about what our own gospel is. That's OK. The search is also holy.

In the meantime, it's interesting to consider that your life may be preaching a gospel of which you are not conscious. The way you live, work, play, and relate to people communicates something about yourself to other people. It's sobering to consider what kind of gospel your life might be unconsciously preaching. Because in many ways your life preaches a gospel much clearer than what you say you believe on Sunday mornings.

This is surely part of Jesus' message to his disciples as he preaches the Sermon on the Mount. Remember that the Sermon on the Mount is not preaching to the general public but to Jesus' inner circle of disciples. In a little while he will send them out on their own to teach and preach. For now he is teaching the teachers.

Jesus uses some interesting metaphors with his disciples. First he tells them they are the salt of the earth. Consider how important salt was in first-century life. Salt not only added savor to food but was essential to food preservation in a world without refrigeration, canning and artificial preservatives. Salt was a necessary commodity.

In comparing his disciples to salt, Jesus is telling them they have something that people need. But he warns them against "losing their saltiness." How can salt lose its saltiness? If it's what we now know as NaCl, a property of which is intrinsic saltiness, it remains salty as long as it remains NaCl. Its saltiness can only change if the salt is corrupted with some other non-salt substance. Probably in Jesus' day there were some unscrupulous purveyors of salt who cut the

salt with something worthless, possibly sand, to increase their profit. Such a substance would be worthless and only good for throwing on the ground.

Jesus is warning the disciples to remember who they are and what they are and whose they are, so that they may not be corrupted and thereby become worthless.

The disciples are Jewish remember. They are God's people. They belong to God. Jesus is calling them back to their roots.

The next thing Jesus says makes this point even clearer. Jesus tells them they are the light of the world. This is a reference to the book of Isaiah where God tells the people of Israel that God will give them as a "light to the nations, that [God's] salvation may reach to the end of the earth." This is a turning point for Israel. No longer is the God of Israel to be understood as a tribal God, the God of Israel only, but the God of the whole world. And Israel is to be the means through which the world is to know God and receive God's salvation. It is no longer sufficient for Israel to just quietly keep the law and save themselves. They have a mission to the world.

When Jesus goes on to talk about fulfilling the law rather than abolishing, this is what he means. Many devout Jews had fallen into the trap of believing that the law consists in following the minutiae of the law, with all of the precious detail about diet and ritual, and forgetting two things: that the essence of the law is to love God and love our fellow humans, and that God's people are to share this message with the world. They are to let their light shine: the light of their relationship with the God of love.

If everyone's life has a gospel to preach, the particular form of that gospel will vary from person to person. But if we are to call ourselves Christian, whatever gospel our life preaches needs to be consistent with the Gospel of Jesus Christ: that the essence of the law is to love God and our fellow humans, and that we are to share this message with the world, somehow.

Not everyone has reached the level of clarity about their life's gospel that my sister has. For many of us that discernment is the work of a lifetime. In the meantime, it behooves us to remember that regardless of what we say we believe, our behavior is preaching up a storm whether we know it or not. Some thought, some prayer, some regular checking in with God is indicated so that we don't inadvertently preach something with our lives that is inconsistent with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Never forget: we are the salt of the earth: something valuable. We have something that people need: the assurance of meaning and worth in God's eyes. Is this a gospel *our* lives can preach?