

The right kind of fast

To worship God and simultaneously be stingy and parsimonious with our resources is not Christian. To spend disciplined, devotional and prayer time and also to spend no time being present to others is not faithful to Jesus' call. To live by a strict moral code and religiously abide by the mores and expectations of "clean living" while quietly accepting injustice and oppression done to our fellow human beings is to wholly miss the good news of Jesus.

Not only had Jesus come NOT to abolish the law but to fulfill it - he picked it up right where Isaiah had left off!

YOU are the salt of the earth! YOU are the light of the world! He didn't say, you should be or you will be, or you *have* to be or you'd *better* be... He said you ARE. You are already. Because it's who God has made you to be. It's a promise. It's a gift. You ARE the salt of the earth! You ARE the light of the world! But then, Jesus asks, how come you're living as if you've somehow lost your saltiness or covered up your light? That's silly! The whole point of salt is "to disappear into the food to make it tastier." The whole point of light is "to dissipate into the darkness, to light it up."

Brian Maas writes in the Christian Century, "The rub, of course, is that we humans, even we so-called faithful ones are hesitant to give ourselves away quite so fully, to dissolve or dissipate quite so completely. We like to hold back a little or to cluster with like-minded people so that we can compliment one another on our saltiness and brightness without the effort of (actually) salting or lighting anything.

Here in the United States, at least, we who call ourselves Christian have for some time tended to cluster our salt and concentrate our light to the exclusion of others and to the benefit of none. Trading humility for hubris, we have salted our culture well nigh to death with notions utterly foreign to the Sermon on the Mount. We speak of Christian values, Christian policies, Christian economics, Christian candidates, Christian plumbers, Christian Internet plans and even Christian hookup sites. We lament being persecuted Christians, overlooked Christians, insulted and mocked Christians, even Christians deprived of the phrase "Merry Christmas." Called simply to bear the savor of our Savior, we bear instead the bitterness of our better-ness. Too much salt is thrown out and trampled underfoot – along with the food it has tainted.

In the same way, we too often hide our light – or at least contain its glow – under a bushel basket, fearful that letting it shine farther might make it less bright in our immediate vicinity. It is as though there are corners of God's world unworthy of the illumination they would know if we let our light be placed on a lampstand rather than under the security of a basket. We should not be surprised that many would rather stand with others in darkness than be cursed by light that shines only on some."

Karoline Lewis is one of my favorite writers and theologians. She writes, “For too long, especially in the church, many of us have allowed our light to be hidden... And when that happens, so goes the truth of the Gospel along with our own.”

She participated in the recent Women’s March and I was moved by her reflections on the march and Matthew 5. “The Women’s March was many things for me,” she writes, “but one thing was certain – it may have been the first time in my life that I truly believed Jesus’ words: ‘you are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.’ Not that I didn’t believe Jesus – but that I didn’t believe he believed in me. As Reverend Amy Butler (lead pastor of the historic Riverside Church in NYC says, “Sometimes being nasty is the same as being holy. And protest can be prayer.”

Lewis continues, “I have never marched for anything (but) I will not stand by and let the Gospel be taken over by those who seem to have a louder voice. I will not hide... afraid of what people might think. I will not get over it (and) I will not succumb to ‘this too shall pass.’ Nor will I allow myself to be excused by my privilege – white, educated, heterosexual...And now I get to add to my privilege Christian. What irony.

So, I marched. I marched for the Gospel I believe in – the Gospel that tells me I am enough and insists that others are as well. The Gospel that says God needs me (and you... and you) to be the salt of the earth. The Gospel that encourages me to speak up for those who have been silenced or have yet to find their voice. The Gospel that won’t let me stand on the sidelines but pushes me out into the world that God loves so that others might know that they are loved and welcomed and worthy.

I marched for the Gospel that does not censor. It does not silence those who are already oppressed. It does not cast suspicion on those who are “other”. It does not act out of fear. It does not bar membership or legislate inclusion. It does not look away and claim that God’s earth isn’t hurting. The Gospel does not ban brothers and sisters who know the same God by a different name. It does not build walls to keep others out.

I marched for the Gospel that is not a viewpoint or an opinion or an alternative fact. The Gospel is Truth – it is Good News!

The Gospel is a call to action, a plea for resistance. It is not an option for us to say, “I don’t the man.” We KNOW Jesus. We know his teachings, his story. Let us follow him.

Salt and light do not exist for themselves. They are both necessary for health and for life and if they are absent, something is drastically wrong. Living faithfully in these times requires a kind of intentionality, a certain resolve, a commitment or a recommitment to Jesus and his Gospel.”

You are the salt of the earth, Alison and Beth! When you volunteer at Family Promise. You are the light of the world, Barbara and Aimee and Katie and all who’ve participated in rallies and marches. You are the salt of the earth, Mike and Gretchen! When you write books and poems and fiery letters to the editor. You are the light of the world, Miriam and Jim, Don and Erica and others who have visited those in prison. You are the salt of the earth, Marie and Roy, CB and

Linda, Linda Doll and Dwayne and Sandy, Karl and Myra, all of you who've served meals at the Lord's Diner. You are the light of the world, Ruth Holliday, when you fix up bicycles and give them away. You are the salt of the earth, Eugene and Cheryl Kaufman, when you volunteer your time with Mennonite Disaster Service.

We are the salt of the earth when we put signs of welcome in our yards and back up our signs with an actual house that we make available to refugees and immigrants. By the way, is that house paid for yet?

We are the light of the world and the salt of the earth when we loose the bonds of injustice and let the oppressed go free. When we share our bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into our homes. When we see the naked and cover them.

Then our light shall break forth like the dawn, and our healing shall spring up quickly. May it be so. Amen.

Sources:

Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume I

<http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=4807> Just Be It, Monday, January 30, 2017
Karoline Lewis.

Living the Word in *The Christian Century* by Brian Maas, January 18, 2017.