

Jeremiah 7:1-11

Matthew 5:13-16

June 13, 2021

Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT SALT LIGHT

Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

When you drive anywhere around here or on Topsail Island or at Wrightsville Beach or in Wilmington, chances are good you will see this logo on many trucks and cars . . .



Troy Hutto, a landscape irrigation contractor, and Mike Moore, a framing contractor, both natives of Jacksonville, Florida were good friends who shared a love of surfing, fishing, and just about anything else that would allow them to be on or near the ocean. They also both had Salt Life tattoos. In 2003, they decided to start a business based on the Salt Life concept. They kept their day jobs and started selling Salt Life T-shirts and car window stickers in local stores. Eventually their sales totaled about \$1 million.

Then Jeff Stillwell heard about what he described as “a little bitty fishing brand with a name that was so good.” Three years after acquiring the brand, Stillwell increased sales to more than \$20 million and expanded the brand to include fishing, surfing, and diving. Three years ago the Salt Life brand was being sold in more than 2,200 stores and generating more than \$100 million in sales.

Jeff Stillwell bought Salt Life because “I thought it could be a lifestyle brand.” Troy Hutto, one of the originators of the concept, said, “It’s just what we do: we fish, surf, lie on the beach. It’s a salt life.” According to the Salt Life website, “Salt Life is more than just a logo; it represents a passion for the ocean, the salt air, and most importantly, a way of life.”¹

Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth . . . You are the light of the world. You are salt light.” We can say that “Salt Light” is more than just a Christian logo on a

bumper sticker; it represents a passion for God's kingdom, Jesus Christ, and most importantly, it is a way of life. At least, that's the kind of life we are called to live as beloved children of God, joint heirs with Christ, who are led by God's Holy Spirit, who are blessed to be a blessing.

Notice how Jesus draws attention to the kind of lifestyle we should have as his followers by giving negative examples. "If salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot . . . No one after lighting a lamp puts it under a bushel basket." (Matthew 5:13, 15) As someone commented, "If salt loses its saltiness, it's no longer salt." I think that's exactly what Jesus is saying to us as his followers . . . "If you don't seek to follow me in everything you do, you can't really be called 'Christians' in the truest sense." In other words, "Christian" is more than just a brand name, it's a lifestyle.

Several years ago, Rev. Hazel Wilson preached at a meeting of the Presbytery of Coastal Carolina. I reckon she was preaching from this same text in the Sermon on the Mount. One line from her sermon that day grabbed my attention and made it into my quote journal. Hazel looked out at all of us and said, "We may be the salt of the earth, but I don't see a whole lot of shakin' goin' on!"

In a sense, that's the gist of the prophet Jeremiah's famous "Temple Sermon." The Lord told Jeremiah to stand in the gate of the temple and to tell the worshipers that their "ways and doings" outside the temple needed to line up with their "words and rituals" inside the temple. The word of the Lord to God's people was this: "Amend your ways and your doings, and let me dwell with you in this place . . . For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will dwell with you in this place . . ." (Jeremiah 7:5, 5-7a)

About 2,200 years after the prophet Jeremiah stood in the temple gate and preached to God's people about their lifestyle, another preacher preached a sermon to his congregation. He shared the same call and challenge to God's people. John Winthrop, an English Puritan lawyer and one of the founders and first governors of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, preached a sermon called "A Model of Christian Charity" to his fellow sailors aboard the ship *Arbella* on April 8, 1630.

Winthrop's sermon is best remembered for its "City on a Hill" section. Winthrop said, "For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world." He encouraged and challenged his fellow believers to avoid "the shipwreck" of not following in God's ways in their new endeavor and said, "Now the only way to avoid this shipwreck and to provide for our posterity is to follow the Counsel of Micah, to do Justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God."

As I read a select portion of Winthrop's sermon, listen for the similarities to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and the call to a "Salt Light" lifestyle: "For this end, we must be knit together in this work as one man [sic], we must entertain each other in brotherly [sic] Affection, we must be willing to abridge our selves of our superfluities, for the supply of others necessities, we must uphold a familiar Commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience and liberality, we must delight in each other, make others Conditions our own, rejoice together, mourn together, labour, and suffer together, always having before our eyes our Commission and Community in the work, our Community as members of the same body, so shall we keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, the Lord will be our God and delight to dwell among us, as his own people and will command blessing upon us in all our ways . . ."2 In the tradition of Jeremiah and Jesus, John Winthrop encouraged his fellow believers to adopt the "Salt Light" lifestyle.

Remember how I noted that Jesus teaches partly in the negative — "if salt has lost its saltiness . . . No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bushel basket . . ." There is a real danger when our "ways and doings" outside the church don't line up with our "words and rituals" inside the church. Mahatma Gandhi, the leader of the 20th century non-violent resistance movement in India, greatly admired the teachings of Jesus Christ, particularly the Sermon on the Mount, which he said shaped his "whole philosophy of life." Gandhi lived among Christians in England, South Africa, and India. He hoped and expected to see the Christians live out Jesus' teachings in his Sermon on the Mount, such as unconditional love, forgiveness, willingness to sacrifice, and meekness (sounds a lot like the Beatitudes, huh?).

But Gandhi was disappointed again and again. When the American Methodist missionary to India, E. Stanley Jones asked Gandhi, "Mr. Gandhi, though you quote the words of Christ often, why is it that you appear to so adamantly reject becoming his follower as a Christian?" Gandhi's reply was telling and reminiscent of the prophet Jeremiah's sermon in the temple and John Winthrop's sermon on the ship Arbella. He told E. Stanley Jones, "Oh, I don't reject your Christ. I love your Christ. It is just that so many of your Christians are so unlike your Christ."

One particular experience from Gandhi's life helps explain his answer to Jones. While Gandhi was living in South Africa, he read the Bible, studied the life and teachings of Jesus, and wanted to explore becoming a Christian. One Sunday he decided to attend a church service. When he arrived, the elder at the church door asked Gandhi, "Where do you think you are going . . ." and then called him an extremely offensive term. The elder then proceeded to tell Gandhi, "There is no room for (and the elder used the offensive term again) in this church. Get out of here or I'll have my assistants throw you down the steps."³

To be honest, I was a bit concerned about having enough time for my sermon preparation this week since I spent all day Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday at Camp Kirkwood, leading a group of ten fourth graders with Karla through all sorts of

activities. But, God had other ideas! It was as if God said, “Phil, open your eyes and your ears and pay attention.” Here are a couple of pictures of our group:



Can you see what they are pointing at? Every day, several times a day, I saw the words over the fireplace in the dining hall: “You are the light of the world.” We spent the week talking about the Lord’s Prayer, singing about God’s love and being God’s light in the world. And, as Karla and I spent time with our ten campers and all of the other campers and adults at Kirkwood Creation Camp this week, God reminded me again and again how important it is for all of us who call ourselves Christians to live as Christ calls us to live – to be “Salt Light” Christians, with a passion for God’s kingdom, Jesus Christ, and most importantly, as a way of life.

And if those daily reminders weren’t enough to help me think about today’s sermon, when I got home Wednesday afternoon from Kirkwood, I found a Facebook post from Rev. Chris Denny, who shared this thought from the Church of Scotland: “As Christ called on His followers to be salt and light, to have an impact on the communities in which we live, we pray that, as we seek to witness for God in the world, we will always do so in a loving and gentle way: remembering that we need to be faithful to our calling to be salt and light.”

“Salt Light” — it’s more than just a logo; it’s a way of life.

Let us pray: Dear God, remind us each and every day that we are your beloved children, called, equipped, and empowered to be salt and light to the world and to love others as we have been loved. May others see Christ working in and through us, to your praise and glory. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

NOTES

¹Information about Salt Life is taken from three sources:

Liz Flaisig, "Living the 'salt life' pays off for entrepreneurs," October 4, 2004 at www.bizjournals.com.

Troy Johnson, "Salt life president to share story at Auburn University's Entrepreneurship Summit," February 21, 2018, at www.ocm.auburn.edu.

www.saltlife.com, "What is Salt Life?"

²Information about Winthrop's sermon is taken from two sources:

"John Winthrop's Dreams of a City on a Hill, 1630," at www.americanyawp.com.

"The City Upon a Hill by John Winthrop" at www.thehistoricpresent.com.

³From "Gandhi's message to Christians," at www.mkgandhi.org.