

Series: Being the Difference

January 5-6, 2019

Title: Salt & Light

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Text: Matthew 2:13-16

Called to be the difference:

“Can you hear me now?”

We’ve all been there: Right in the middle of a phone call we have that haunting feeling that the other party may no longer be on the line. And thus the all-too-familiar question: “Can you hear me now?” Then we hear a little beep and our phone pops up a message that the call was dropped. Ugh.

As of 2017 there were 215,000 cell towers in the United States. To make a call or get online with your smartphone, you have to be in line-of-sight of at least one of those towers. And these towers come in all shapes and sizes. We’re all familiar with the usual cell tower, but some locations evidently call for a more creative approach.

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Whatever the form, the function is the same: to make sure that you don’t have to ask, “Can you hear me now?”

“Let there be light!”

The sole function of a cell tower is to send and receive radio waves. You can’t see them or feel them, but those radio waves saturate the air around us. They are, in fact, a form of electromagnetic energy, just like visible light. These radio waves carry information to and from our phones, allowing us to surf the net, make phone calls, exchange texts, and do Facetime.

We’re so used to this technology, that the only time we think about it is when it’s not working. Just think of what it would be like if cell coverage went down in the middle of the afternoon: no phone call from your kid to let you know when to pick her up at school, no checking your checkbook balance to see if you’re okay with your next purchase, no google maps for finding your destination. The list is endless.

Whatever the tower looks like, it keeps our world going in more ways than we can imagine.

Called to be the difference:

Jesus says that you and I are called to make that kind of difference in our world. He put it this way:

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Matthew 5:13a, 14a NIV

"You are the salt of the earth....You are the light of the world."

Salt and Light: two things absolutely essential for life. In Jesus' day salt was a valuable commodity, so much so that our word "salary" comes from the Latin root "sal" or salt. The word salary originally meant the amount of money given to a Roman soldier to buy salt.

Why was salt so important? Until the invention of refrigeration, salt was used to preserve food: think sauerkraut, kimchi, ham, bacon and a host of other foods. And that is just one of the many benefits of good old sodium chloride.

The same is true for Light. No light, no life. The Genesis Creation Story begins with God creating light out of the chaos and darkness of the pre-creation. "Let there be light!"

Jesus says that you and I are God's dispensers of God's very life in the world. In more modern terms, we are like God's cell towers, broadcasting His love and truth into His world. And like cell towers, we come in all shapes and sizes. God puts us everywhere in His world so that there can be a spiritual line-of-sight connection with people who need to find Him.

We're called to be the difference.

Light of the World

A special calling:

When Jesus said the words "You are the light of the world," the people listening to Him would have known exactly what He meant. The prophet Isaiah announced that God would raise up a leader who would be His servant in bringing God's rule to the world:

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Isaiah 42:5-7 NIV

*⁵This is what God the LORD says—
the Creator of the heavens, who stretches them out,
who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it,
who gives breath to its people,
and life to those who walk on it:*

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*⁶"I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness;
I will take hold of your hand.
I will keep you and will make you
to be a covenant for the people
and a light for the Gentiles,
⁷to open eyes that are blind,
to free captives from prison
and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.*

The same God who said, "Let there be light!" is now saying, "You are My light! I am re-creating you as the first act in my New Creation. And you will carry that mission forward in the world."

Now Jesus takes this same proclamation and applies it to you and me: "You are the light of the world!"

A city on a hill

In order for cell towers to do their job, they have to be visible. Remember the "line-of-sight" thing? That's why they are sometimes hidden in plain sight.

The same is true for us in our calling as God's light in the world. Jesus says:

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Matthew 5:14b-15 NIV

"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."

You don't put a cell tower transmitter at the bottom of a well. And you don't put a lamp under a trash can. For the light to do its work, it has to be visible.

Isaiah described Israel's mission by referring to a city on a hill:

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Isaiah 2:2-3 NIV

In the last days, the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it.

Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths."

The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

The "city on the hill" as the holy city, Jerusalem, where God dwelled. It was, you might say, His "cell tower" for reaching a lost world. From it streamed His word.

Now, Jesus says, "You are the city on the hill. You are the place where God dwells. You share God's word with a lost world."

Salt & Light

Let your light shine!

And so we have work to do – the good work of joining God in the restoring of His good world:

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Matthew 5:16 NIV

"In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

We're to be salty salt that preserves and purifies in our world. We're to be lights shining in the dark places of this world:

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Philippians 2:14-16 NIV

¹⁴ Do everything without grumbling or arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may become blameless and pure, "children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation." Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky ¹⁶ as you hold firmly to the word of life.

We are God's cell towers, connecting a lost world with its wonderful Creator. He made us for just this purpose.

So let's make 2019 a year in which Jesus shines through us like never before!