

Isaiah 59:1-9a

Matthew 5:13-20

1 Cor. 2:1-12

“Move us toward working for justice,
and not be afraid of evil things.” AMEN!

During study this week, I came across
the true story of
Jonathon and Kitty Napela.

They lived in Hawaii in 1870.

This Christian couple lived in the midst of leprosy
during a time when it carried
intense stigma and fear.

To be diagnosed meant you encountered a
“death before death” because of the
isolation and hopelessness that
befell the person.

When Kitty contracted the disease
she was banished to an isolated
island off of Moloka'i. (Mo-lo-ka-i)

Jonathon chose not to protect his own
safety or reputation.

Instead, he went with her into exile to share
her fate in the leper colony so that she'd
not suffer nor die alone.

Together they walked into a place most avoided.

Jonathon spoke about his marriage vows and his faith.

Those vows, and his faith, told him
love meant more than
comfort and safety.

You can imagine how harsh life was in the colony.

Poverty, isolation, and the visible decay of bodies
were all around.

Yet, witnesses wrote of the way the Napelas' spent
their last years, and told about how,
in the midst of their own suffering,
they were paradigms of fidelity and service.

Not only did they endure their own suffering,
they cared for others and helped organize
and strengthen the small faith community there.

Even after Jonathon himself contracted
the disease that ravaged his body,
he continued to serve as a local church
leader for the people of the colony.

This true story reminds us of the hidden love story
that can occur amidst separation and death.

Two people chose to keep their promises and show up

in a frightening, forsaken place.

They did it for love and they refused
to let anyone carry their cross alone. (Pause)

Jonathon and Kitty's actions
followed the words Jesus said up on
that mountain long ago.

When Jesus preached to the diverse crowd
that followed him, he met a crowd of diseased,
possessed, paralyzed and hurting people.

A people who knew just what it felt like
to be cursed and rejected.

A curse and rejection that is being experienced
by immigrants and trans siblings, today. (Pause)

This section about salt and light is meant
to be connected to Jesus' testimony about
fulfilling the law and the prophets.

Jesus' fulfillment of being salt and light is
what propels human beings to be
the salt of the earth and
the light of the world.

What an epiphany his words were
to the hurting people that flocked to Jesus.

Imagine what it must have been like to hear our Lord say:

You (all) are the salt of the earth.

You are (all) the light of the world. (Pause)

Legend has it that salt was a precious commodity that was so valuable that in some regions it was traded weight for weight with gold.

Indirectly, our word “salary” can be derived from the word “salt.”

It was a valuable commodity used to preserve meat, fish, cheese, and other foods to fend off starvation in lean months (or years) in times before refrigeration.

When Jesus told them, and he tells us, that you (all) are the salt of the earth

he was communicating how precious they (and we) truly are.

And communicating to everyone that we are worthy of being noticed.

Claim your identity and live!

You are the light of the world and therefore not meant to be covered or suppressed.

I view this as a big thing in Jesus' sermon.

It is the gospel, just like it is the gospel
to hear him say he's come to fulfill the law
and the commandments.

Fulfilling them with emphasis on love and service;
salting and lighting up the world. (Pause)

Lately, Colleen and I have been cooking meals together.

It's good marriage therapy. :-)

I've noticed that I'm not very good in knowing
how much salt to add to food during preparation,
but good cooks always seem to know.

The right amount enhances flavor,
too much, destroys it.

But Jesus was not speaking about cooking with salt.

It's his sermon illustration that
revealed salt (and light) to be images
that shape God's calling upon our lives.

Ignore the call and people get trampled.

Hide the light and everything burns.

When we think of the “Light of the world”
we quickly think of Jesus.

But Jesus tells the people,
“You are the Light of the World;
You are the city on a hill.”

You can almost feel them scratching their heads,
asking, “Who me?”

“Yes, you,” Jesus replied.

In closing, I would like to share with you
a section of Isaiah 58 but this time
the translation is from The Message:

“What I am interested in seeing you do is:

Sharing your food with the hungry,
Inviting the homeless poor into your homes,

Putting clothes on the shivering ill-clad,
Being available to your own families.

Do this and the lights will turn on
And your lives will turn around at once.

Your righteousness will pave your way.
The God of Glory will secure your passage.

Then when you pray, God will answer.

You will call out for help and [God] will say, “Here I am.”

AMEN!