

Matthew 5:13-20

February 5, 2017 The Fifth Sunday Epiphany

Be who you are

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I had a professor who loved to speak about the *indicative* and the *imperative*. The indicative he reminded us is a sign or expression of something. The imperative is an unavoidable necessity demanding action. Dr. Craddock urged his freshly minted pastors not to confuse the two when understanding scripture or the Christian life. Christians, he cautioned, tend to tilt immediately toward the imperative. But always *doing* often leads to forgetting *being*. If that sounds a bit nerdy to you, I understand. It does to me too. But here is how it bears on Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.

Remember when Jesus took his disciples up on the mountain for his Sermon on the Mount? How did he begin? Blessed are the Poor in Spirit; blessed are those who mourn. And so on. The "are" that Jesus pronounces is the indicative; it's the sign of blessing. To be merciful, or to seek peace, or to hunger and thirst after righteousness *indicates* a state of blessing. This blessing *indicates* who you are. And, truly knowing who you are in Christ makes all the difference in your life.

What might be another example of the indicative? When the Holy Spirit descends upon Christ in baptism, the voice from heaven says "you are my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased." And we claim this for ourselves in Christ: "you *are* the beloved." One of the best things we can do for one another is remind each another of our identity in Christ. We can remind one another: You *are* the beloved. It's remarkably easy to forget who you are when you are stumbling in the dark, battling fears and anxiety, worried about your job or your relationships or how to parent when you don't even know the next right step.

### **There are two essential questions in life: who am I? What am I do with my life?**

Jesus says: You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. Notice he doesn't say: go do this or that, and you might become salt and light. No. He says clearly: you *are* the salt of the earth. You *are* the light of the world. You are the beloved of God. This is who you **are** as a follower of Jesus in the world. Don't forget it. When you do remember it.

Then what is the imperative? Jesus says simply **be** who you are. This is *imperative*: **be** salt for a tasteless world, preserve what is good in it, bring forth its rich flavors. He says to his followers: live your lives as you already *are*, because when you do you will be what the earth needs most to survive. Be the light of the world that has so many places that are shrouded in darkness without light. Go to those dark places, do not fear them or banish them. Go to the dark places and let your life shine there, bringing light and life where it is needed most.

This is how the imperative flows from the indicative.

The inward journey of the Christian life is learning fully to embrace who I am Christ. The outward journey is letting my life be fully present in the places of hurt and suffering and human longing.

What if all the doing consisted in being who you are as a follower of Jesus, and being that person fully, with others right now? Imagine if the company of Jesus followers realized our purpose right now is simply being the salt of the earth? All that Jesus asks of us is to *be* in those places that have lost all taste and are in danger of losing life itself. He asks you to be light wherever the light has grown dim or the darkness threatens to take it all away. You don't have to go far to be the light of the world or salt of the earth. In fact, you don't have to go anywhere other than where you are. You **ARE** the beloved. You ARE salt of the earth. You ARE the light of the world. When the followers Jesus act like who we are, people are drawn to the God who fills them.

To his followers – the Church - he says: If you are not being who you are, then what's the point? It's a waste of time.

Be who you are. Salt of the earth. Light of the World.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.