

Aspire (Week 6) - Outreach and Mission
Yesterday's Sermon Summary



1. KirkWood's sixth and final core value which reads, "CORE VALUE #6 Outreach and Mission – “Go, Proclaim, Do” - Following the example and teachings of Jesus, we make our world bigger, not smaller. We share the message of Jesus and show love and care for those that are struggling (the poor, lonely, homeless, hungry, sick, elderly, and others in need). We prioritize partnerships with other organizations because we can do more of God’s work together than we can on our own."

2. We spent our time yesterday taking a deep dive into a chief metaphor Jesus uses for "outreach and mission" in the gospels, namely Matthew, Mark, and Luke: "You are the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5.13).

3. Jesus' audience would have understood "salt" three ways (we tackled two on Sunday; we'll do the third one in our Thurs. email this week). First, salt was one of the few spices available to the common person in the ancient world. So Jesus is saying that His followers are meant to make the world a "tastier" place, a lovelier, more delightful place for all people.

3. Second, salt was a preservative, one of the only ways to keep your meat from spoiling quickly. So Jesus is also meaning to communicate that His followers are meant to stop the world from ruining itself. It's as if the world is bent toward a kind of moral, relational degeneration, left to its own devices things just get worse or deteriorate, but Jesus' disciples are work with God to move things in the opposite direction.

4. So how do Jesus' followers fulfill this divine call to be "salt"? Well, we have to read Matthew 5.13 in its context. The paragraph immediately prior to it tells you the "how" ([Matthew 5.3-12](#)), you know this passage as The Beatitudes. So it's as Jesus' followers are committed to things like being meek, hungering for justice, being peacemakers, working to purify their own hearts, etc. that we can become that "salt" that helps the world around us flourish, as well as stopping its worst tendencies.

5. All three versions of this text (in Matthew, Mark, and Luke) contain some statement like this: "Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is useful neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; they throw it away. If you have ears to hear, then hear" (Luke 14.34-35). So once we lose our witness as "salt," it's very hard to get back. And, worse, we become useless in regard to the mission Jesus is giving us.

6. It would seem as if the North American church would do well to heed this warning. Consider this from retired Canadian pastor Carey Nieuwhof: "As the data over the years accumulates, the verdict is in: We know what unchurched people think of the church. It's not great. When the people you're trying to reach struggle with you, it's harder to reach them. Only 21% of non-Christians have a positive view of Christianity; half have an overtly-negative view of Christianity. And what do non-Christians think of Christians? That Christians are a) judgmental, b) hypocritical, c) irrelevant, d) detached from the real issues of facing the community, and e) Christians are against more than they're for. So when you as a Christian are connecting with an unchurched person, on a scale of 1-10; at best you're starting at a three or a zero, but it's just as likely that you're starting at -5 or -8."

7. C. H. Spurgeon, the well-known English preacher from the 1800s, voiced the warning of Luke 14.34-35 this way: "A church that does not exist to reclaim sinners, to fight evil, to confront error, to put down falsehood, a church that does not exist to take the side of the poor, to denounce injustice and to hold up goodness, is a church that has no right to be. Not for yourself, O church, do you exist, any more than Christ existed for Himself."

8. Mark's gospel includes a unique facet to this command to go and be "salt": "Have salt in yourself, and be at peace with one another" (Mark 9.50b). Here we see that Christians practice being "salt" within the church so that they can go and be "salt" outside of it. We work at making life a little more delightful for each other, we work at counteracting the worst of our culture's influence on one another, we help each other thrive, and in so doing we learn better how to do that for the world around us.

9. A good way to end would be to cite Carey Nieuwhof again from the same article, and this quotation helps point the forward for us as those are given the sacred task of being "salt" to others: "The right response isn't getting mad at non-Christians who don't see the better side of Christianity or the potential of the church. Instead, repentance, humility, reconciliation, and a new reality moving forward are good places to start. When overcoming perception gaps as large as the data reveals, one of the most important things Christians can do is to be the opposite of what non-Christian people would expect you to be. Fortunately for Christians, the opposite of what most people expect is pretty much what Jesus embodied. Be compassionate. Kind. Gracious. Curious. Embracing. Genuine. Loving time and again. The mystery of why people are walking away from the church is less of a mystery all the time. If Christians become more like the authentic church, more people will want to be part of it. The less we do, the more they don't."