

## **Be in the Spotlight - Matthew 5: 13-20**

### **CASL - 5, 2023 - Black History Month**

We ought to be prepared to be in the spotlight if we are to be the salt and light in the world, even if that places us under scrutiny.

When we own our role and identity and try to live as salt and light of the world, there are often factors that keep us from the spotlight, shoving us to the back, telling us we are not good enough - whether as a people, a church or as individuals. So we often have to claim our place under the sun. But we don't have to fight, we just need to be. For some people, their whole race group is often ridiculed. In the 1850s Irish immigrants to the USA were ridiculed. An example is "NINA" (no Irish need apply) on job postings or hiring places. But that didn't keep them down. Just ask JFK, Ronald Reagan, George Clooney and Nicole Kidman, to name but a few influential Irish- Americans. Oh March is Irish-American Heritage Month. We are in February, Black History Month. The centuries long subjugation, ridicule and oppression of Black people is well known. And I'm just going to leave this weekend's memes alone - God Bless America!

Where were we? Black History Month. People being denigrated and pushed down when trying to shine. People unmistakably being salt and light are denigrated, attempting to push them out of the spotlight, driven by bigotry. James Brown, the Godfather of Soul sang during the Civil Rights Struggle, only 4 months after the assassination of the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. "Say it Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud!"

In recent years, Black Lives Matter and other movements calling for an end to racial injustice, have reclaimed this statement for all the world to hear.

The Church needs to take a page from these movements. Not just in the content of the statement, but in its assertiveness, in its boldness. The modern church, especially in the so-called first World is afraid to assert itself as Christian even. We, as the Church, have gone through many persecutions and enslavements over centuries. Even today we are ridiculed as meaningless by the growing "Spiritual but not Religious" sector. We are called irrelevant by the so-called post-modern world. That's modern day persecution.

So, in an attempt to be accepted, we assimilate. We water down or play down our identity, so that we will be accepted. We become church equivalents of what Black people call "Oreos" and "Coconuts", terms used for Black and Brown people trying to act acceptable to White people. Brown/Black on the outside and White inside. Looking like a Christian on the outside but an assimilated self on the inside.

The church needs to take a page by asserting, "Say it loud, I'm Christian and I'm Proud."

A quick story from Living Lutheran magazine:

People told Pastor Cardenas (CARRR-denas), you are crazy to build a church on the hill in La Esmeralda, Guatemala. But being inspired by other places of worship being built on hills, he went ahead. Pr. Cardenas had been part of a community that had returned to Guatemala from Mexico, where they had fled to as refugees from Guatemala's Civil War.

Today, St. Augustine Church is built on a hilltop. The writer of this story about our ELCA global partnership in Guatemala, describes the location of St. Augustine as audacious, (in a good way). Helped by its "out-there" attitude, they have become a beacon of grace; a church that the community around come to for help and hope.

Jesus calls us, as the church, not to hide our light under a bushel basket or container like a bucket or bowl, but on a lampstand.

Jesus says that we are the salt of the earth, the light of the world. If the salt has lost its saltiness, that is, the purpose of its being, then it is good for nothing else but to be treated as dirt, gravel. Are we, as the church, losing our purpose and value? Does the world still see a need for us in society? Over 65% of our churches are in decline. Even amongst those who call themselves christians, 2/3rds of christians are not in church on any given Sunday.

Are we still the light of the world, showing the way? Jesus says, a city set on a hill cannot be hidden, like the church in Guatemala, St. Augustines. Are we out-there and are we drawing people to Jesus, causing them to give glory to God, as Jesus says in Matthew 5:16.

The metaphor of light goes back from the beginning of time. But let's fast forward to Isaiah 49:6. God says to Israel: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."

John describes Jesus as that light, the true light. Jesus says of himself in John 8: **12** "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Jesus says, let your light so shine before the world that they might see your good works and glorify your father who is in heaven!

Pray God to give us power to be the light that draws all to salvation in Him. "God gives us the power not to shrink from the spotlight, and let the spotlight of Jesus shine through us! Even though that would place us under scrutiny." Black people throughout history have influenced the world by claiming their place in history - and the half hath not been told. In taking a page, are we as church prepared to proclaim, "Say it Loud, I'm Christian **and I'm Proud!**"