Andrew Kinoti Lairenge
Vermilion/Mannville
February 9, 2020

Sermon on the Mountain- Light and Salt of the World

Isaiah 58:1–9a
Matthew 5:13–20

Today we continue with the "Sermon on the mount" as found in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 5. Last Sunday we looked at the teachings of Jesus on blessedness. We saw that for Jesus, to be blessed was to be understood differently than in the regular understanding of his time. So, among other sayings Jesus said, blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted, blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth, and blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled

After the sayings on blessedness, Jesus continues to tell his disciples, that they are the salt and the light of the world. In the last few Sundays, we have done a little comparison on how the other Gospels have talked about particular topics. Today too, I checked at what other Gospels say about the salt and the light. I did not find much about the light as far as these sayings of Jesus are concerned. But I found something about the salt in both the Gospel of Mark and Luke. To be able to compare let us first hear how Matthew puts it again:

> You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot (NIV)

But what does Mark say? In Mark 9: 49-50 we read,

> Everyone will be salted with fire. "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other (NIV)

As I have mentioned before, it is widely accepted that Mark was written earlier than Matthew and Luke. And therefore, Matthew and Luke evidently used Mark as their main source about Jesus. Looking at saying about salt in Mark, we see Matthew trying to edit and make sense of a somehow confusing statement by Mark. Matthew could not make sense of one particular verse in Mark that says, "everyone will be salted with fire." So, Mathew edited it out completely. Matthew also edited out the part that says, "be at peace with each other" and in way changed Mark's, "have salt among yourselves" to "you are the salt of the earth."

How about Luke? In Luke 14: 34-35, we read:

> "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out (NIV)

Luke maintains the flow of Mark, but introduces, “it is not fit for the soil or the manure.” Like Matthew, Luke writes that such salt can only be “thrown out.” However, Luke does not say that “you are” the salt of the world like Matthew or “have salt among yourselves” like Mark.

I don’t know what to make of these differences in the three synoptics Gospels. But one thing is somehow clear. Jesus used salt as an example in his teachings. The details depended on those who heard or recorded it. So, for today let us go with what is recorded by Matthew.

When Jesus tells his disciples that you are the salt and the light of the world. That “you” is plural. It means all the disciples of Jesus are not just listeners. They all have an important role to play in the ministry of Jesus as the Messiah. Their presence in the ministry of Jesus is part of God’s plan in bringing the rule of God to the world. In other words, Jesus is saying even though I am the Messiah, I cannot do this a lone. You all are important elements (used in chemistry sense) of this kingdom of God.

You have to bring taste where there is tastelessness. In ancient world and even today salt was used for healing purposes. Therefore, you all have to play your role in healing the wounds of the people on this earth. Even in the ancient times salt was used as a preservative. So, Jesus is saying, all my followers have a role to play in preserving the goodness of the kingdom of God on earth.

The same can be said of being the light of the world. Jesus is calling his disciples not be mere listeners or bystanders. Jesus is calling on each of his followers to take their part in shining the light of God to a world that is often darkened by sin and corruption. I guess to be the light and the salt of the world is the same message that prophet Isaiah talked about when he challenged the pious people to stop being merely religious. Isaiah called them to stop wasting their time fasting religiously and go pursue justice instead. Isaiah laments,

> Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here I am (NIV).

This kind of justice is an example of what it means to be the salt and the light of the world. May we pursue this saltness and this light in our Christian lives.

In the name of God, the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit. AMEN