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“Getting Rid of the Pastor”

Matthew 5:13-17, 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

As we are not TOO far removed from the Christmas holidays, I think that we can all relate to having received gifts that left us scratching our heads as to just WHAT the giver was thinking. In the previous church we served, early on in my solo pastorate career, I received such a curious gift from one of the members. It was a framed page out of an issue of *“Our Daily Bread”* devotional book. ‘Curious’ because this day’s offering was entitled: “Getting Rid of the Pastor.” Needless to say I read it with GREAT interest. Here’s how it began:

“A Christian leader told about some church members who came to him for advice. They wanted to know of a way to get rid of their pastor. Sensing that they were not being fair, he gave them these suggestions [to ‘rid’ themselves of their Pastor]:

Look your pastor straight in the eye while he is preaching and say “Amen!” once in a while. He’ll preach himself to death.

Pat him on the back and tell him his good points. He’ll work himself to death.

Rededicate your life to Christ and ask your minister for a job to do. He’ll die of heart failure.”

The article goes on to say that, despite the fact that no pastor is perfect (can I get an ‘AMEN’?), it is very important that the church support and encourage him/her. It closes with this final comment: **“A pastor leads best when the people get behind him (or her).”**

So, as strange as it might seem for the church’s pastor... ME... to preach a sermon to his own congregation ‘Getting RID of the Pastor,’ it actually supports a thought expressed by another minister older and wiser than myself: ‘Ultimately, the pastor’s goal of ministry is to make his job expendable...’ To empower those entrusted to his discipleship to do the very thing that Jesus, in our Gospel reading from last week, called his first disciples to do: **“to teach... to preach... to heal.”** Those responsibilities that lie at the very core of what a pastor... of what ANY follower of Jesus Christ... is called to do.

And so, in the next few minutes, let us consider today's words of Scripture, and what they say to us about that central tenet of the Reformed faith: **"The Priesthood of All Believers."** That foundational principle of Presbyterianism in which each one of you, by virtue of your belief in Jesus Christ, is called to be a 'priest'... a minister, an intercessor' between God and your fellow man. Of God's ultimate, Kingdom-goal for His church in **"Getting rid of the pastor."**

As we read Jesus' words in that 5th chapter of Matthew, where he says those familiar words, **"You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world,"** just WHO is he talking to? Who IS that 'you' that he refers to? This 5th Chapter of Matthew is, as you likely aware, from the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus is speaking to the multitudes of people who have come to listen to him. So, Jesus is talking to a variety of common folk, from different backgrounds, with varying degrees of faith... particularly faith in HIM. In other words, people not too different from you or me. Young and old, rich and poor, with varying degrees of education and backgrounds. But all of them there for one reason: to **learn more** about this mysterious miracle-worker named JESUS. Also not too different from what should bring us to THIS place...

So what does this mean to US? How do OUR lives relate to what Jesus warns about: this 'salt that has lost its taste,' and is 'no longer good for anything but to be discarded?' Well, to all you 'literal thinkers,' my understanding is that the only way for salt to lose its flavor is to **dilute** it... by immersing it in so much liquid that it dissipates. That unlike so many other things that diminish in strength over time, salt does not grow weaker merely by its AGE. Yes, it's A-G-E. Sooo, for all you 'old salts' out there... and, for those of us who are sure getting there... it is NOT your age that limits your ability to be that 'salt of the earth' of which Jesus speaks. But rather, how much we allow our faith to be 'diluted' by the world. How much we 'immerse' ourselves in the 'dis-tractions' of the world, rather than the 'at-traction' of Jesus Christ. The 'distractions' of **fear** of the future, **doubt** in the present, **failures** in the past... skepticism of God's being able to use 'little ol' us.' Or worse, questioning God's existence at all. As the 'salt of the earth,' we must remain 'grounded' in the One through whom we will NEVER 'lose our taste'... as others experience through us the **'flavor of faith.'**

The other image that Jesus uses in speaking to those 'seekers' is that of **LIGHT**. He declares to them that ***"You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill CANNOT be hid. ... let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."*** (Mt. 5:14, 16) Jesus message is pretty clear: it is not merely up to Him to bring 'light' to a dark world, but rather, those that will follow after Him. That if His followers are truly built upon the 'hill,' (hmmm... perhaps a 'hill' like Calvary?)... the 'city' that is PEOPLE **'CANNOT be hid.'** It will be **evident** to ALL just whom their lives are built upon... the 'solid rock' of Jesus Christ. And that the good works that they do will not simply be their own, but 'reflective' of the glory of their heavenly Father.

So how do WE do that? How do we let our light shine before others so that they see GOD in our actions? How is it **evident** that our lives are built on Christ... the 'solid rock on which we stand?' Well, there's a couple of ways that can come to us from this. **[show calendar]** Yes, it's a calendar. Our Presbyterian Church denominational calendar, to be exact. Most every Sunday there is a particular ministry, group, or holy day that is lifted up for recognition. Today there are two: The "Souper Bowl of Caring," and "Chaplains Sunday."

You may have heard of the former before. **[pic]** Held in conjunction with that *other* 'Super Bowl,' it is a nationwide effort by young people to help raise money, and awareness, for the issue of hunger. And while we are not having a youth-sponsored event here, you DO yet have an opportunity to help combat hunger in our area. Next Saturday, as you know, we will be joining with FCC for "Gumbo Bowl II." The proceeds from this event will go to support Abraham's Tent. So, this is a chance to 'let your light shine' for the glory of some of God's needy children. So come to **compete...** or to **eat...** or BOTH!

The other form of service and ministry that I mentioned was that today is recognized as "Chaplain's Sunday." As I looked for a logo for this 'Chaplains Sunday,' what I found were many references to this: "The **Four Chaplains.**" Also known as the "Immortal Chaplains," they were four U. S. Army chaplains who gave their lives to save other civilian and military personnel as the troop ship *SS Dorchester* sank on February 3, 1943, during World War II. They helped other soldiers board lifeboats and gave up their own life jackets when the supply ran out. The

chaplains joined arms, said prayers, and sang hymns as they went down with the ship. **They provided comfort to others at the time of death. Even at the expense of their very own lives.**

Of course, the compassionate, sacrificial ministry of chaplains is not limited to those who serve in the military. As most of you know, we are blessed to have such a 'minister' in our church family: Willie Bellard. In case you need a reminder of what he looks like... and since I wouldn't want to *embarrass* him by making him stand up 😊... You may recognize him from times like this... **[pic at pulpit]** or this **[pic doing children's time]**. But THIS is my favorite... **[pic with daughter putting on ballet shoes]** And on this particular Sunday, I would like to personally give thanks for Willie... as well as his lovely wife Naomi, and their precious daughter Amari...for ALL that they bring to our community... both our church community, as well as the greater community in which we live. God bless you all...

And as we ponder our gratitude for those like Willie, and his supportive family, who face the daily pastoral challenges of death and dying, we could well think, 'HOW do they DO that? How do they deal with such pain, and suffering, and loss on an everyday basis?' Though I would not begin to speak for my brother, it was the words of Paul that we read earlier that spoke to me of how Willie... and I... and indeed, ALL of us... can be given the ability to speak to others in difficult times. Times when we find ourselves woefully inadequate to express the depth of love and emotion we feel. That though we may come into a situation, as Paul said, ***"in weakness and in fear and in much trembling,"*** (YES, even by 'paid pious professionals' like Willie and me!), what is important is that we are ***"NOT to come proclaiming the mystery of God... in lofty words or wisdom."*** I know full well that if I should ever be tempted to explain God's will, I am in DEEP trouble!

The great Apostle, as educated and spiritual as he was, is quite clear in pointing out that his proclamation of Christ was not about his 'convincing, persuasive words of wisdom,' but rather, ***"with a demonstration of the Spirit of power."*** That it was by the way that he 'let go' of his own pride and 'let God' use him, that those he reached out to would come to a ***"faith..."*** (that would) ***rest NOT on human wisdom, but on the power of God."*** (1 Corinthians 2:5) As YOU and I humbly seek to be God's servants, we must acknowledge that NONE of us are

equipped to tell of God's logic... but, ALL of us can be equipped to show God's love. God's love which IS a '**demonstration of the power of God's Spirit**' in us...

Earlier I spoke of that term 'priesthood of all believers,' and it's integral part of the fundamental doctrines of the Reformed Christian faith. It comes to us from THE great reformer, Martin Luther, who wrote a letter (just 3 years after the 'Protestant Rebellion' he instigated in 1517) which was to serve to dispel the thought that Christians be divided into two classes – 'spiritual and secular' (You know... our church life in these walls, and all the rest of it out there). He wrote that, *"In fact, we are all consecrated priests through Baptism, as St. Peter in 1 Peter 2[:9] says, "You are a royal priesthood and a priestly kingdom," and Revelation [5:10], "Through your blood you have made us into priests and kings."*

And so, as we consider just how Luther echoes both Peter and John in their declaring us to be 'priests,' here's one last image of today's message. **[Pic of pastor caricature]** Like this cartoon character, I can 'preach' at you all day that you are what Luther said... 'consecrated priests through Baptism'... a 'royal priesthood', a 'holy nation'... but MY saying it won't make YOU believe it. But perhaps, the more that YOU say it, the more you will come to 'own' it. And so, in closing, I'd invite you stand, and repeat with me the words that Jesus said to that early 'congregation.' We will make His words a bit more personal... and let us say them with 'gusto', like we really BELIEVE it:

"I AM the salt of the earth. I AM the light of the world. A LIFE built on the Rock, Jesus Christ, cannot be hid. Let MY light so shine before others, that they see my good works and give glory to my Father in heaven!" ...And may all of God's 'salt and light' say, "AMEN!"

In my message I referred to the closing comment of that 'unusual' devotional gift: "A pastor leads best when the people get behind him." As we consider the calling that Christ puts on ALL of us as "the priesthood of all believers", I would suggest a change: **"A pastor leads best when the people get BESIDE him."** TOGETHER, let us go forth to be witness to the 'light of the world.' And as we do, let us never forget that we do not go alone... but that the Spirit of the living God...