



***Multiply!***  
**“WE’RE GOING PUBLIC WITH THIS!”**

Rev. Gary Haller  
First United Methodist Church  
Birmingham, Michigan  
Scripture: Matthew 5:13-16

*“Let me tell you why you are here. You’re here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You’ve lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage.*

*Here’s another way to put it: You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don’t think I’m going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I’m putting you on a light stand. Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand – shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.” (The Message)*

The story is told about two trouble-making brothers who created havoc throughout the town where they lived and were despised by most people in the area. One day one of the brothers up and died. The other brother went to plan the funeral with the pastor. He told the minister, “You better say my brother was a saint or face the consequences. And it ain’t going to be pretty for you and your church!” Now what is a poor preacher to do with that?

The minister got up to preach the funeral. He hesitatingly cleared his throat and then proceeded to tell the congregation, “Now we all know the deceased. We know what kind of person he really was: Jim Bob was a lyin, cheatin, nasty, loppy-eared, fur-bearin’, bushy-tailed, low-down scoundrel, someone you’d be afraid to turn your back to. But...compared to his brother here, he was a saint!”

Now that’s what I call a resourceful pastor. Of course, we know that we don’t become saints by what somebody says at our funeral. Genuine sainthood is about how we lived when alive. There is no fooling people with the truth about our lives. As the saying goes, “We all preach our own funerals.” Sainthood is not about a title given to us on our arrival in heaven. It is a path pursued in daily living. It begins when we decide to change our lives by growing into the image of Christ.

Mother Teresa said, “Sainthood consists in doing God’s will joyfully. Faithfulness makes saints. The spiritual life is a union with Jesus: the divine and the human giving themselves to each other.” At the conclusion of our service today we will sing that wonderful hymn, “For All the Saints.” I like to think we will be in that number, or that we’re trying to be.

Would it surprise you to know that I absolutely love the ministry? I love what I do. I love the privilege of preaching from this pulpit, and proclaiming the gospel of Christ at this strategic corner of Maple and Pleasant. I love the privilege of performing a wedding as a couple holds hands and exchanges vows and rings. I am humbled by the privilege of being with a family when they have lost a loved one, and to be able to bring the hope of God and the hope of eternal life to that family. I love the privilege of baptizing an infant or an adult into the family of faith at First Methodist. And I love the joy of breaking the bread and sharing the cup as symbols of the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

But even though I love the pastoral ministry, I could write a book about the responses I get when someone asks me the question, “What do you do?” and I answer with just four little words, “I am a minister.” I cannot tell you the many times a ski lift has turned into a confessional when some skier on the long lift ride asks me, “So, you’re from Michigan – and what do you *do*?” And then all the way up some two-mile lift I hear the stories of their failures, betrayals, heartbreaks and brokenness, all the time knowing that before we jump off the lift and take the plunge down again I need to offer words of assurance, forgiveness and grace.

Same thing in an airplane, except they have no fast exit there. I know a minister who was on an airplane and the man was sitting next to him said, “And what do you do?” He was about to answer, when the flight attendant came down the aisle with that little cart and asked them what they’d like to drink. The man said to the stewardess, “I would like a double scotch on the rocks.” Then he said, “Now what did you say you do for a living?” He said, “I’m a minister.” And the man looked at the flight attendant and said, “On second thought, make that a Diet Coke.”

The most comical episodes, though, have come on the golf course when Laurie and I have been paired with some unsuspecting guys. They’re all set for a great afternoon on the links, and then they do something absolutely idiotic: they ask us what we do. And when we tell them, the uniform reaction is one of shock. Their faces fall. They put the beer away. Their language becomes very different. And generally they look like someone died until my partner throws her first club—then we’re human beings again.

Now, what image comes to your mind when you hear the word “minister” or when you hear the word “saint”? Isn’t it true that we think of ministers as being more religious or saintly than others? The staggering truth is that not only am *I* a minister, but *you* are ministers too. In fact, every Christian is intended by God to be a minister, every Christian is intended to be a Light-Bearer. And, wait ‘til you hear this: every Christian is intended by God to be a *saint*!

Time after time in the scriptures, you and I are called “saints.” What a pity we don’t think of ourselves as such. We are encouraged to model our lives after that of Jesus Christ so that we might be his saints. We’re given a sacred responsibility. We’re to be a light set high for all to see. We’re to be salty seasoning bringing out God’s flavors in the world. Yet what do we do? We sell ourselves short. We don’t think that we’re capable of ministry, let alone sainthood. We leave stuff like that to those people who are fanatical, who don’t have a life, to those who hear voices. In truth, we don’t have a very high opinion of what God expects of ordinary people like you and me.

Fred Kane writes: “For me, what arises again and again is the wonder of who we are. There are no insignificant people. Your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses.” Our calling is to help each other *see* this holiness, this God-glory in ourselves. We are meant to help one another grow into the image of Jesus Christ, faithfully following his path, so that we too may be holy.

The great Christian writer and defender C. S. Lewis captured the glory of this reality. He believed, like Wesley, that we are continually shaping our eternal souls, either for better or for worse. Lewis believed that we are meant to go “on to glory.” His conviction is that we either can grow into the very image of God, or we can contort that image beyond recognition. He wrote: “It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to see and reach one or the other of these destinations.”

Are we helping each other? Listen again to his conclusion. “All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to see and reach one or the other of these destinations.” It’s not just that we shape ourselves; we help one another see and reach one of these destinations. We are communal beings, even the most solitary of us. We shape the communities of which we are a part. We shape our community of faith here by our willingness to serve, by the generosity of our stewardship, by the faithfulness of our prayers, by the joy of our witness. Lewis says we are called to be saints, and that we are to take this seriously. He believed we live in a society of “possible gods and goddesses.” If you are here—and you all *seem* to be—I hope you know that God not only intends to make a saintly creation out of you, God also wants you to help others to be saints. To be lights witnessing to God’s love and salt flavoring and changing God’s world.

“Let me tell you why you are here,” Jesus said. “You’re here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. We’re going public. God is not a secret to be kept.” God is not a secret. We need to help others know that they also are children of the heavenly Father, who can grow saints. Into the image of Jesus Christ.

Fred Craddock, who for years was one of the finest teachers of preachers, took a vacation with his wife Nettie in the Smoky Mountains of Tennessee many years ago. And on their way home he had a most interesting experience. Fred said:

We were at dinner in a restaurant out from Gatlinburg called the Black Bear Inn. Early in the meal, an elderly man approached our table and said, “Are you on vacation?” I said, “Why, yes.” “Where are you from?” he asked. “We’re from Oklahoma,” I replied. “What do you do in Oklahoma?” I said, “I’m a minister.” “What church?” “The Christian Church, Disciples of Christ,” I answered.

He paused a moment and said, “I owe a great deal to a minister of the Christian Church,” and he pulled up a chair and sat down with us. I said, “Yes, have a seat,” trying to make it seem like I sincerely meant it. “Now tell us about that minister.”

He said, “I grew up in these mountains but my mother was not married, and the whole community knew it. I was what was called an illegitimate child, and I was ashamed. When I went into town with her, I could see people staring at me, making guesses as to who was my father. At school, the children said ugly things to me, so I stayed to myself during recess and ate my lunch alone.

“In my early teens, I began to attend a little church back in the mountains called Laurel Springs Christian Church. The minister had a chiseled face, a heavy beard and a deep voice. I went to hear him preach, but I was afraid that I wasn’t welcome since I was, as they put it, a bastard. So I would sit in the back and when the sermon was over, I would move out because I was afraid that someone might say, ‘What’s a boy like you doing in our church?’

“One Sunday morning, some people lined up in the aisle before I could get out and I was stuck. Before I could leave, I felt a hand on my shoulder. It was the *minister*. As I trembled in fear, he looked at me and seemed to be staring deep within me. I knew what he was going to do. He was going to make a guess about whom my father was. A moment later, he said it. ‘Well boy, whose son are you? You look familiar to me! Whose son are you anyway?’ And I was just about sick with fear.

“Then he said, ‘Wait! Wait! Don’t tell me. I see the resemblance! You’re a child of...’ and he paused there. I knew it was coming, I knew it. I knew the ugly truth was going to come out. And then the minister said, ‘I know whose child you are. The resemblance is unmistakable! Boy, you’re a child of God!’

“Then he swatted me on the bottom and said, ‘Now, go and claim your inheritance!’ And I left the sanctuary a different person. In fact, that was the beginning of my life.” And then this strange man stood up and left the restaurant.

As soon as he left someone at the next table said, “Do you know who that is? Do you *know* who that is?” And Craddock, of course, had no idea. And the man said, “That was Ben Hooper! He’s a legend! Ben Hooper was the long-time Governor of Tennessee!” And at that moment, Craddock recalled how his own father had told him how when he was young, the people of Tennessee had twice elected as governor a man named Ben Hooper.

You see, you’re not “nobody’s child.” You’re God’s child! And knowing this can be the beginning of your life. “Let me tell you why you are here,” Jesus said. “You’re here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this!”

Now understand: when you come to Christ’s table today you need to remember, “I’m somebody. I am a child of God!”

When you come to this table, you remember, “I’m somebody’s brother. I’m somebody’s sister. I’m part of God’s great family.”

When you come to this table today you should remember, “I have a mission to carry Christ’s love in my heart and words and actions to each person I meet so that they can know that they are a child of God!”

And when you come to Christ’s table, remember: you are called to be a saint.

May we pray? Gracious God, you have made us for yourself and we’re always going to be empty so long as we hold ourselves back from you. Help us give ourselves to you so completely that we actually want to be made over in the image of Jesus Christ. Help us to go public with our faith, that we might be a light unto the world, and salt that brings out the God-flavors of this world. So help us be those who stop and look about us for those who need us, that we might truly be called your saint. We pray through Christ who loves us and shapes us. Amen.