

“Dancing in the Dark”

February 5th, 2023

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Matthew 5:1-16

NKJV(New King James Version) **odd verses & FNV** (First Nations Version) **even verses**

1. And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him.

² So he took a deep breath, opened his mouth, and began to share his wisdom with them and teach them how to see Creator’s good road.

³“Blessed are the poor in spirit,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4. *“Creator’s blessing rests on the ones who walk a trail of tears, for he will wipe the tears from their eyes and comfort them.*

⁵ Blessed are the meek,
For they shall inherit the earth.

⁶ *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
For they shall be filled.*

⁷ Blessed are the merciful,
For they shall obtain mercy.

⁸ *“Creator’s blessing rests on the pure of heart. They are the ones who will see the Great Spirit.*

⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers,
For they shall be called sons of God.

¹⁰ *“Creator’s blessing rests on the ones who are hunted down and mistreated for doing what is right, for they are walking the good road from above.*

¹¹ Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.

¹² *So let your hearts be glad and jump for joy, for you will be honored in the spirit-world above. You are like the prophets of old, who were treated in the same way by your ancestors.*

“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden.”

Like a rabbi, a teacher, Jesus sits down and teaches the disciples who have climbed up the mountain to hear more.

The main teachings of Jesus are found in Matthew 5-7, the Sermon on the Mount. I’ve always heard “You are the light of the world...so let your light shine before others that they may see your good works and your father be glorified” as an exhortation to shine more, be more, do more for Jesus.

We love hearing a familiar text, but it’s also good to have a fresh take. The Bible is alive, and the Holy Spirit is working to speak to us through the

text. So it doesn't surprise me (it delights me!) when I see something new.

In the lectionary — the scheduled texts for the day — the Beatitudes were to be read last week and the text on Salt and Light this week. But we had our wonderful Celebrate Life anniversary service last week and so I decided to bring them together. Of course they do go together — they are even in the same chapter.

Blessed are the poor in Spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of God. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are you when people insult you, revile you and falsely utter all manner of evil against you because of me.

When Jesus says “You are the light of the world ... let your light shine before others” He is not speaking to shy people who should do more evangelism. He is speaking to hurting, broken, traumatized, persecuted people.

You who are hurting. You who have suffered. You who are misunderstood. You who have been a target of other people's anger and loss of control — *you* let your light shine.

What? What do you mean? I need to heal and get strong so that I can be more and do more. We heard that last Sunday morning with Greg Duggan and others like Karen who came up to the microphone saying they used to think that they needed to ‘have their shit together’ in order to come to church, in order to belong at church, in order to be good Christians. Friends, I still fall into that trap.

I follow Richard Rohr's daily meditations. This week he is talking about the two stages of the spiritual life. He borrows the framework from Jung and I'm borrowing it from Richard Rohr (so hopefully this won't be a bad game of telephone tag) but I found it enlightening and helpful as I looked at our call as Christians to be salt and to be light.

The first stage of the life is to build identity, to build knowledge, to build security, to build influence and control: to build the self. Rohr points out that in life, we need a healthy sense of self.

The second stage is to understand the purpose of that building. So the first part of life is about building the container and the second part is filling that container with good coffee (or water) and letting those contents be poured out for others. Without the container and the building there can be no place to put the spirit. Rohr says the first half of life is our survival dance, and the second half of life is our sacred dance. The problem is that many of us never get to the second stage. Our whole lives are spent focused on doing better, achieving more, creating walls and security and control for our lives. Most people never get beyond their survival dance.

The tricky thing for those of us who work hard at the first half is that you can't make the second half happen. You can be open to it, you can be

present to it, you can make space for it, but you can't achieve the 2nd part — you encounter it. You encounter it when the rug of security and control has been pulled out from under you. You encounter it as you go through and emerge from a time of great loss — loss of someone you love, the breakdown of a relationship, loss of a home or job.

It's why people in recovery are sometimes grateful for rock bottom, because it's in that place of pain and weakness that people let go of building their kingdom and let God's kingdom come in. This is what Rohr says:

"If you welcome the second half of life, this is what you will find: you learn to hear "a deeper voice of God" than you heard before. "It will sound an awful lot like the voices of risk, of trust, of surrender, of soul, of destiny, of love, of an intimate stranger, of your deepest self."

You *are* the salt of the earth. You *are* the light of the world.

I kept hearing "you *should be* the salt of the earth. You *should be* the light of the world." Jesus says to those gathered around him: "Blessed are the poor in spirit...blessed are those who mourn...blessed are you when people insult you, revile you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you ... you, you are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world." In your pain, in your hurt, in your not-enoughness you can discover the greatest light. It doesn't come from the security of wealth or health or even of human relationship — it comes from a much deeper, richer place. It comes from God.

February is Black History month. I have learned a lot about the depth of theology that comes from the African American tradition. It is a theology that emerges from pain and suffering but is not defeated by it.

I heard an interview this week with the Rev. Dr. Ottis Moss III. The senior minister at Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, he is considered to be one of the top 12 best preachers in the English speaking world. Ottis Moss took over as senior pastor in early 2008 when the Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Wright retired from Trinity. You may or may not remember the big controversy that he got into. You see Trinity is (or was) Barak Obama's church. Wright was Obama's minister — he married Michelle and Barak. As Obama was running for president everything was scrutinized — including this pastor's sermons. Jeremiah Wright's words from sermons were scrutinized — really taken out of context — and this hugely affected Obama's campaign. In the aftermath of 911 Wright was critical of the US and its legacy of violence on the international stage. In one sermon he was quoted saying: *"Violence begets violence. Hatred begets hatred, and terrorism begets terrorism."* So seven years later, these words are taken to mean that Wright said *the US deserved 911*. As Ottis Moss was just beginning his time at the church, all of a sudden the media was all over Trinity Church. They had bomb threats. For an entire year, before church,

they had to have the church checked for bombs.

Ottis Moss received death threats. He remembers those words “I’m going to kill you!” He ended up needing security when he was outside of work or at home. Even his children got a security detail when they were at school.

So one night at home Ottis and his wife are woken up because they hear noises in the house. His wife tells him “You’ve got to go and check that out!” So he gets out of bed and grabs his baseball bat, preparing himself in mind and body to protect his wife and children.

It’s 3:30 in the morning. After a bit of searching, he realizes that the noise is coming from his 5-year old daughter’s room. When he opens the door, there she is, practicing her ballet and dancing away! She sees her dad and says “Look at me! I’m dancing!” And he stares at her. “What are you doing? It’s the middle of the night! You’ve got to get back in bed!” But again she says “Look at me Daddy! I’m dancing in the dark!” In that moment Moss says he heard the Spirit say to him “Look at her, look at her!” And so he does ... and he realizes the darkness is all around her, but she’s dancing. The darkness is around her but *it’s not inside her*.

So after tucking her back into bed Moss goes downstairs and rewrites his sermon for the next morning. He preaches a message to his weary congregation who are under attack because of racism and because of their association to the first potential Black president. He encourages them to dance in the dark!

What allows them to dance in the dark? It’s not the outside security or outside peace, but the music they can hear coming from a deeper place.

Others may not hear the music you hear, but they can see you move to the music.

There is a lot of darkness in this world. When you shine, *you* are the light of the world. Weary people who are traveling a difficult journey will see your light and be drawn to it and wonder where it comes from, and find hope that there is more to life than the injustice. We are called to shine ... not out of our own strength and light, but from the Holy Spirit in us. We are called to add flavour to the world ... not because *we* are put together, but through the cracks of the container of our lives.