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## Do What you Are

*Homily by Lisa Wiens Heinsobn given February 5, 2017*

*The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany: Matthew 5:13-20*

How often have you asked yourselves recently the question, “What in the world should I do?” Is that a question that has been somewhat to strongly in your minds? Perhaps some of you have been asking yourself how to make your way through the increasing noise and turmoil in our nation’s political landscape. Should you post that article on Facebook or not? Should you go to that march or shouldn’t you? Should you admit to your family who you voted for and why? Should you downsize or stay in your current house? Should you say something to your dad about his drinking or shouldn’t you? Should you try to reach out across the political divide? How do we determine the answer to difficult questions about what to do?

A long time ago I was feeling some vocational angst. I was a lawyer, and I mean no offense to all the good lawyers there are in this world, but I hated the practice of law and could not for the life of me figure out what it was I was supposed to do next. I was working in a very nice office making good money in a skyscraper in downtown Los Angeles, and I was utterly miserable. One day someone gave me a book called “Do what you are.” The whole premise of the book was that we could use our Myers Briggs or Enneagram personality types to pick sustainable, meaningful, life-giving vocations for ourselves. The book said that as long as you are trying to do something that is in conflict with who you are, you are going to be miserable. Conversely, as soon as you create some alignment between who you are at your core and what you are doing and saying and expressing in this world, you will experience satisfaction because you will have integrity. What if, every time we ask ourselves what we should do in any given situation, we are asking the wrong question? What if the first question in any given situation is not, what should I do here? But, who am I in this situation? Who do you want to be in this situation? Who does God call us to be?

Jesus in today’s gospel text says something very curious. He says, You are the light of the world. Now if you’re really listening to that sentence it should startle you, because it doesn’t show up anywhere else in the entire Bible. It’s a pretty radical sentence. We’ve all heard Jesus himself described as the light of the world lots of times. But Jesus here doesn’t say that: he says, *You* are the light of the world. You are the salt of the earth.

Light and salt are two simple, ordinary things. They are two things whose being and doing are indistinguishable. Light shines; salt is salty. They are what they do. They do what they are. Light reveals reality. It brings color and joy and life to the world. It simply illuminates.

So Jesus is saying that we are the light of the world. Now I want to point out what Jesus is not saying. Jesus is not saying you should try with every molecule of your being to be the light of the world. He is not saying that you have the light of the world, or that you ought to be the ought of the world. It might be tempting to see this text that way; it shows up in the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus makes some outrageous demands of his followers. In the Sermon of the Mount, Jesus says that not only may you not commit adultery, but you can’t even look at someone with lust in your heart. Not only must you not commit murder, but you must not even call someone a fool. At the end of today’s text he says, unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. That’s like saying unless you’re more generous and pious than Mother Theresa you’ll never be good enough. So Jesus is making all these outrageous demands

of his followers—demands that, if we are honest, we will admit are simply impossible to follow. And next to these difficult demands, he simply says that we *are* the light of the world. What are we to make of this?

In the scriptures, the earlier a word or a person or an idea shows up, the more important it is in understanding the themes of the whole. Listen to the very first words of the very first book of the Bible. In Genesis 1, it says this:

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was a formless void, and darkness covered the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters. And God said, let there be light. And there was light.*

From the very beginning of our scriptures, we understand God as a constantly creating force who is always speaking things into being. God is making things new through speech, through words. And one of the very first things God makes is light—light that illumines on the very first day, as the first created thing--before the sun and moon and stars are created on day four. Light, in the cosmos God creates, is essential.

When Jesus says, you are the light of the world, he is not just describing something. Instead, like God did at the very beginning of creation, Jesus in the very act of speaking these words is creating the light which illuminates us and which is meant, not for our personal enjoyment, but for the life of the world God so loves.

Jesus is not saying you should be the light. He is not saying you should try harder to be the light. He is not saying you have the light. He is saying you are the light of the world. A light that can't help being what it is. And in the very act of saying that this is what we are, he is creating the light in us as he speaks. He is speaking into being in us the capacity to reveal the truth, to illuminate what actually is, for the sake of love and fulfilling the purposes of God. We as the light of the world are not the light for our personal enjoyment. To be light is an inherently public vocation. And revealing the truth is for the sake of God's purpose, which is not to accuse or to condemn or to hate, but to make everything whole.

Light simply shows what is. In the era of fake news that's a pretty significant vocation for us. Now I'm guessing that when I asked you earlier if any of you had "what should I do" in mind, some of you were thinking about today's political situation and how to stay sane and be a positive force in this world. What I want to ask you to consider again, before you ask yourselves what you should do, is to ask yourself who God invites us to be in Christ. Our identity is as the light of the world. It's equally as much about who we are as about what we do. And Light reveals the truth for the sake of love and healing and wholeness.

Part of our function as light is to reveal the ugly side of what is, but that is not the same thing as judging, condemning, and hating. Jesus, in this same chapter of Matthew's gospel, says that we are to love our enemies and to pray for those who are persecuting us. He says this so that we might be complete and whole.

Many volumes have been written about Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, which is where today's text comes from, and there is so much more that could be said and that needs to be said about this text. But for tonight, I hope you will understand that Jesus is saying something very simple. When you get caught up in ambiguity and overwhelm and wondering what you should do or ought to do in face of the turmoil going around us politically or in your life personally, try detaching from all that turmoil and simply sitting with Jesus saying to you, You are the light of the world. Allow the words of Jesus to create the reality they describe. Realize Jesus is not saying you need to grit your teeth and try harder. He is saying, you are made to face the truth of what is happening, in the light of God's love and God's purposes for healing in this world. He is saying that no matter where you are at or what you are experiencing, God can make something new within you, and that newness can bring light to everything and everyone around you. You do not need to be stuck. You can be given freedom and purpose by the living Christ who, in the power of God the Creator, is always making everything new. You are the light of the world. Amen.