

## Make a Difference for Goodness' Sake

### Back to School Commissioning Service for Students and Educators

**Thesis:** Because Jesus lives in you, you have influence and capacity to make a difference for good.

**Text:** Matthew 5:13-16, Romans 12:1-2

We are so excited today to commission students and educators as we start the new school year. Because Jesus lives in each of us, we have influence and capacity to make a difference for good. In a society that is polarized and anxious, I want to call all of us to live in such a way that we make a difference for goodness' sake (Acts 10:38).

1. **Because Jesus lives in you, you have influence and capacity to make a difference for good** (Matthew 5:13-16).
  - a. *"Your lives are like salt among the people. But if you, like salt, become bland, how can your 'saltiness' be restored? Flavorless salt is good for nothing and will be thrown out and trampled on by others. 14 Your lives light up the world. Let others see your light from a distance, for how can you hide a city that stands on a hilltop? 15 And who would light a lamp and then hide it in an obscure place? Instead, it's placed where everyone in the house can benefit from its light. 16 So don't hide your light! Let it shine brightly before others, so that the commendable things you do will shine as light upon them, and then they will give their praise to your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:13-16 Passion NT).*
  - b. **Jesus said, "you are the salt of the earth."**
    - i. God had called Israel to be the salt of the earth; but Israel was behaving like everyone else, with its power politics, its factional squabbles, its militant revolutions. How could God keep the world from going bad—the main function of salt in the ancient world—if Israel, his chosen 'salt', had lost its distinctive taste? (NT Wright, Matthew for Everyone).
    - ii. **I believe that Jesus lived a differentiated life, and he invites us to live like he did with the help of the Holy Spirit.** "It is fascinating to see how Jesus remained connected to his enemies, the Pharisees. He continued to engage them in his public ministry, and he even went to their homes to share meals. In other words, he was able to remain both defined and connected. Individuals who have the healthiest relationships embrace and hold in tension the two competing realities [of being defined and staying connected]. They define themselves

and they stay connected to those who see things differently” (Faithwalking 201 v. 4, p. 121).

- iii. Differentiation of self “refers to an individual who is able to be clearly defined in his/her beliefs, values, and convictions and live into these beliefs, values and convictions with a high level of integrity—even in moments of high anxiety. He/she does this while also exhibiting a capacity to stay deeply connected to those who hold differing beliefs, values and convictions” (Faithwalking 201 v. 4, p. 120).
- iv. You are a unique individual, created by the Lord. You and I need have clearly defined beliefs, values, and convictions; and, we need to stand up and say what we think, feel, and believe with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15). We need to be the individual (distinctive) blessing which God created us to be without giving into the temptation to isolate or to withdraw from others.
- v. And, we need to stay connected to others. We need each other. We need to give others the right to say what they think, feel, and believe. **It is hard work** to stay connected without giving up self and going along with the group just to be accepted, or to earn approval, or to minimize our anxiety. Or, when others do choose to express themselves, **it is hard work** not to isolate and cut off when we disagree with them.
- vi. “A well-differentiated person is able to do two things at once: she is able to define herself by finding ways to say, ‘This is what I think; this is what I feel; this is what I want; this is what I will do,’ while at the same time allowing (and even inviting) others to say what they think and feel and want and choose to do. She is able to do this without either backing down or bullying others; instead, she remains calm, connected to her deeply held values and focused on being the person she wants to be, regardless of how others are being” (Faithwalking 201 v. 4, p. 124).
- vii. Illustration: Hurricane Katrina, 2005, 250,000 people displaced to Houston, Timothy McGee Junior in HS and a displaced student at Cy Falls High School.
- viii. **Application:** **If we don’t stay connected in a healthy way with others, how can we exercise influence for goodness and how can we keep things from going bad around us?**
- ix. *“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” (Matthew 5:13 MSG).*

c. **Jesus said, “you are the light of the world.”**

- i. In the same way, God called Israel to be the light of the world (e.g. Isaiah 42:6; 49:6). Israel was the people through whom God intended to shine his bright light into the world's dark corners, not simply to show up evil **but to enable people who were blundering around in the dark to find their way. But what if the people called to be the light-bearers had become part of the darkness?** That was Jesus' warning—and also his challenge. Jerusalem, the city set on a hill, was supposed to be a beacon of hope to the world. His followers were to be like that: their deep, heartfelt keeping of God's laws would be a sign to the nations around that the one God, the creator, the God of Israel, was God indeed, and that they should worship him (NT Wright, Matthew for Everyone).

ii. **Are Christians today a part of the solution or the problem?**

1. Some who claim to be followers of Jesus are failing to show his bright, glorious light into darkness.
  - a. We are called to demonstrate the light, glory, and power of the Lord.
  - b. We are called to raise the spiritual level around us wherever we go.
2. **Some who claim to be followers of Jesus are actually advocating or becoming part of the darkness with their anger, fear, and ungodlike actions, attitudes, values, and choices.**
  - a. Do we bully others, or do we come alongside the marginalized and minimalized? Do we bully, or do we allow others to express what they think, feel, and believe without running over them?
  - b. Do we judge others, or do we reach out to others with restoring love?
  - c. Do we make decisions based on fear or gossip, or do we seek the insight and discernment of the Lord into situations and circumstances?
  - d. Do we run our families and raise our children with the values of the culture that says that they have to be involved in everything and neglect church, or do we prioritize spiritual practices like corporate worship and humble service to demonstrate that Jesus is Lord?

3. **Are you a part of the solution or part of the problem?**  
Calvary, let's be a part of the solution. **I believe that is who you are and who we want to be, a people of solution.**
- d. **Application: Where does the world need salt and light right now, and how can we, through following Jesus, provide it?**
2. **Because of what the Lord is doing in you (Romans 12:1), you are an agent of transformation (Romans 12:2 NIV and MSG).**
  - a. *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will (Romans 12:2 NIV).*
    - i. **With God's help, you get to be an agent of transformation and blessing in this world.**
    - ii. **If you live an unthinking or unreflective life**, the world will press you into its mold of who the world thinks you are supposed to be and what you are to think. **If you just react without reflecting**, your emotions or vows will control you, rather than the Lord leading you (Matthew 6:10).
    - iii. **Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking.** *Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you (Romans 12:2 MSG).*
    - iv. We want to live a reflective life, a thoughtful life; not a reactive life.
  - b. **Here is the way we are called to live.**
    - i. *Beloved friends, what should be our proper response to God's marvelous mercies? I encourage you to surrender yourselves to God to be his sacred, living sacrifices. And live in holiness, experiencing all that delights his heart. For this becomes your genuine expression of worship. 2 Stop imitating the ideals and opinions of the culture around you, but be inwardly transformed by the Holy Spirit through a total reformation of how you think. This will empower you to discern God's will as you live a beautiful life, satisfying and perfect in his eyes (Romans 12:1-2 (Passion NT)).*

### Closing prayer

Lord Jesus, because you live in every one of your followers, we have influence and capacity to make a difference for good. Please forgive our culture; it is so polarized and

anxious. Forgive us if we are contributing to the polarization and anxiety. In this midst of this culture, I ask you to help us to live in such a way that we make a difference for goodness' sake, just like you (Acts 10:38). Help us to be the salt of the earth. Help us to be the light of the world. Help us to live thoughtful, reflective lives, in the name of Jesus. Forgive us for living reactive, unthinking lives. With your Holy Spirit helping us, we want to show and tell the beauty and goodness of the kingdom of God.

**Ministry Time: a spiritual transaction will take place**

1. **Today, we want to pray for students and educators as they head back to school.** May you be salt and light, making a difference for good.
2. **Commissioning students and educators.**
  - a. We declare over you that you are agents of blessing. You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.
  - b. We declare that you have anointing and influence for good.
  - c. We declare that you are anointed as agents of transformation.