

First Presbyterian Church  
Cheyenne, Wyoming  
February 6, 2011  
Rev. Bob Garrard

Worship Theme: Making a Difference in the World  
Matthew 5:13–20, Isaiah 58:1–12; 1 Corinthians 2:1–16

“There is an ancient legend first told by Christians living in the catacombs under the streets of Rome picturing the day when Jesus went back to glory after finishing all his work on earth. The angel, Gabriel, meets Jesus in heaven and welcomes him home. ‘Lord,’ he says, ‘Who have you left behind to carry on your work?’ Jesus tells him about the disciples, the little band of fishermen, tentmakers, farmers and housewives. ‘But Lord,’ says Gabriel, ‘what if they fail you? What if they lose heart, or drop out? What if things get too rough for them, and they let you down?’ ‘Well,’ says Jesus, ‘then all I’ve done will come to nothing!’” “But don’t you have a backup plan?’ Gabriel asks. ‘Isn’t there something else to keep it going, to finish your work?’ ‘No,’ says Jesus, ‘there’s no backup plan. The church is it. There’s nothing else.’ ‘Nothing else?’ says Gabriel. ‘But what if they fail?’ And the early Christians knew Jesus’ answer. ‘They won’t fail, Gabriel,’ he said. ‘They won’t fail!’”

“Isn’t that a marvelous thing? Here are the Christians of Rome, dug into the earth like gophers, tunneling out of sight because of the terrors of Nero up above. They’re nothing in that world! They’re poor, despised, and insignificant! Yet, they know the promise of Jesus: ‘You won’t fail! You’re my people, and you won’t fail!’

“That’s what Paul tells us in I Corinthians, doesn’t he? ‘When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom,’ he says. ‘I came to you in weakness and fear, with much trembling.’ Why? So that the true power of God might be revealed.”

“Tony Campolo once told of a friend of his who was walking through the midway at a county fair when he met a tiny girl. She was carrying a great big fluff of cotton candy on a stick, almost as large as herself! He said to her, ‘How can a little girl like you eat all that cotton candy?’ ‘Well,’ she said to him, ‘I’m really much bigger on the inside than I am on the outside!’”

“That’s essentially what Paul is saying here. On the outside we seem to be nothing, but on the inside we are as big as the kingdom and the power and the glory of our God. Says Paul, ‘This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual words.’ Indeed!” We are the people of Jesus Christ and we will not fail him. “Emphasis,” 2/9/11

Paul could truthfully write that on the inside we are as big as the kingdom and the power and the glory of our God. We will not fail Jesus Christ because of what Jesus declared to us on the Sermon on the Mount. “You are the salt of the earth.” “You are the light of the world.” He did not say, “You will become salt and light” but You ARE salt and light. You ARE bigger on the inside than outside. We are as big as the kingdom and the power and the glory of our God. Because, as Paul wrote, “Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the **Spirit that is from God**, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. God has made us the “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world,” by the Holy Spirit out of sheer grace to spread the

good news of Jesus Christ in word and deed. Or as Jesus preached, so that “others may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” Jesus was teaching us that God has made it possible for us to make a big difference in the world, not by our own power or to our own glory, but by the power of the Holy Spirit and to the glory of God. Jesus could preach this because he lived it better than anyone. He set the example we are to follow. We will not fail him.

We might ask, “Who am I that God would give all this to me and expect this of me?”

Consider this story of a lowly nobody, by the world’s standards, who made a huge difference because the Holy Spirit was in him, the gift of God had been bestowed on him, and his faith in Jesus Christ was bigger than his body. He did not fail Jesus.

“There's a marvelous little story tucked away in the pages of Edward Gibbon's seven-volume work, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. It tells of a humble little monk named Telemachus living out in the farming regions of Asia.

Telemachus had no great ambitions in life. He loved his little garden and tilled it through the changing seasons. But one day in the year 391 AD, he felt a sense of urgency, a call of God's direction in his life. Although he didn't know why, he felt that God wanted him to go to Rome, the heart and soul of the empire. In fact, the feelings of such a call frightened him, but he went anyway, praying along the way for God's direction.

When he finally got to the city, it was in an uproar! The armies of Rome had just come home from the battlefield in victory, and the crowds were turning out for a great celebration. They flowed through the streets like a tidal wave, and Telemachus was caught in their frenzy and carried into the Coliseum. He had never seen a gladiator contest before but now his heart sickened. Down in the arena men hacked at each other with swords and clubs. The crowds roared at the sight of blood and urged their favorites on to the death. Telemachus couldn't stand it. He knew it was wrong; this wasn't the way God wanted people to live or to die. So little Telemachus worked his way through the crowds to the wall down by the arena. "In the name of Christ, forbear!" he shouted. To forbear in this case means “to be slow to retaliate or express resentment.”

Nobody heard him, so he crawled up onto the wall and shouted again: "In the name of Christ, forbear!" This time the few who heard him only laughed. But Telemachus was not to be ignored. He jumped into the arena and ran through the sands toward the gladiators. "In the name of Christ, forbear!" The crowds laughed at the silly little man and threw stones at him. Telemachus, however, was on a mission. He threw himself between two gladiators to stop their fighting. ‘In the name of Christ, forbear!’ he cried.

They hacked him apart! They cut his body from shoulder to stomach, and he fell onto the sand with the blood running out of his body. The gladiators were stunned and stopped to watch him die. Then the crowds fell back in silence, for a moment, no one in the coliseum moved. Telemachus' final words rang in their memories: ‘In the name of Christ, forbear!’ At last they moved, slowly at first, but growing in numbers. The masses of Rome filed out of the coliseum that day, and the historian Theodoret reports that The

Christian Emperor Honorius was impressed by the monk's martyrdom and it spurred him to issue an edict banning gladiator fights. The last known gladiator fight in Rome was on January 1, 404 AD, so this is considered the date of Telemachus' martyrdom."

"Never again was a gladiator contest held there! All because of the witness and the testimony of a single Christian who" had the Holy Spirit in him, the gift of God had been bestowed on him and his faith in Jesus Christ was bigger than his body. Telemachus responded with all he had to Jesus' declaration, "You are the salt of the earth." "You are the light of the world." "Emphasis," 2/6/11

There is another ancient true story that illustrates how we are the "the salt of the earth and the light of the world." "During the time of the Reformation John Foxe of England was impressed by the testimony of the early Christians. He gleaned the pages of early historical writings and wrote a book that has become a classic in the church, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*.

One story he tells is about an early church leader named Lawrence. Lawrence acted as a pastor for a church community. He also collected the offerings for the poor each week and that led to his death. A band of thieves found out that Lawrence received the offerings of the people from Sunday to Sunday, so one night as he was taking a stroll, they grabbed him and demanded the money. He told them that he didn't have it and that he had already given it all to the poor. They didn't believe him and told him they would give him a chance to find it. In three days they would come to his house and take from him the treasures of the church.

Three days later they did come. But Lawrence wasn't alone. The house was filled with the people of his congregation. When the thieves demanded the treasures of the church, Lawrence smiled. He opened wide his arms and gestured to those who sat around him. "Here's the treasure of the church!" he said. "Here's the treasure of God that shines in the world!" Unfortunately the thieves killed this courageous man of faith.

As your pastor, I could say the same, not only to thieves who might hold us for ransom, but to those who might wonder in to our worship. I have seen the Holy Spirit in you in your faithfulness to worship, and generosity of compassion shown to people in need. The gifts of God are alive in you as you give so freely of your tithes, time and talents. The depth of faith in Christ that speaks of his grace is seen in your prayers, in your forbearance with one another and strangers, and how you have handled your own adversities. Yes, you are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. You can make a difference together in the world for God! "Emphasis," 2/6/11

For those times we do fail Jesus, lose our saltiness and hide our light under a bushel, Jesus invites us to have supper with him. In this communion, he feeds us his very self. In his body and blood, he reminds us that he died to wash away those sinful times and promised to never fail us. He restores us to be his salt and light so that we can make a difference for him in the world again.