

“Living with Integrity”

[The video, “Integrity” was shown.]

Integrity has been very important to me over most of my life. Frankly, early in my adulthood, I had great difficulty restraining my disgust for a person, who clearly had no integrity, especially, who lied. During this **“Who Are You?” Worship Series**, this Sunday’s focus is on **Integrity**, so that subject has been much more in my thoughts.

As I was doing some research for this message, I came across a **2002 sermon by Rodney Buchanan titled, “Integrity And The Christian”**. Buchanan said, **“The news has been rife with stories of the lack of integrity in our culture.”** “First it was the Enron scandal and the accounting firm of Arthur Anderson. Then it was WorldCom. Even Martha Stewart, the apron-clad icon of hominess, has been brought into disrepute through what appears to be unscrupulous business methods and practices. Something as American as baseball now has multimillion dollar players striking for more money. The Roman Catholic Church is embroiled in one of the worst scandals which anyone in several generations has seen. Our political leaders have had more than their share of scandals and corruption.”

Buchanan’s 2002 sermon continued, **“The Columbus Dispatch had two editorial cartoons** this week which addressed the crisis we face as a culture. The first one had large office buildings on Wall Street with a single small building being crunched between them. The little building had one word written over it . . . **‘Ethics’**. The message was clear that ethics has been squeezed out of the business world. The second cartoon had Moses on the mountain receiving the Ten Commandments. Moses says to God: ‘Thou shalt keep thy dirty hands off of children? Well, duh . . . Do you really think that needs to be spelled out?’” Buchanan answered, “Evidently it does, because the cartoonist adds the quip, **‘The editorial sin of assuming too much.’”**

Buchanan elaborated, “The very politicians supposed to be protecting society are abusing the nation with their power. The very priests supposed to be protecting children are abusing them. The very companies who are supposed to make the free market economy work are damaging the economy through their shady business deals.” **“Where are those people now, who said that character did not matter”**, “and shouted to us the mantra: ‘It’s the economy stupid?’” Buchanan concluded his 2002 sermon, “Now it is impossible not to see and understand that character affects the economy. A moral and spiritual collapse in the business world leads to an economic collapse, and eventually a cultural collapse if it is not dealt with. A moral meltdown in the church leads to a collapse of the church. A moral breakdown among political leaders leads to a collapse of the government. It ought to be abundantly clear by now that” **“character does count and that you reap what you sow”**. (Rodney J. Buchanan July 14, 2002 at Mulberry St. UMC in Mt. Vernon, OH.)

After reading the pessimism of Buchanan over the breakdown of political leaders in his 2002 sermon, I came to have hope there may be some politicians with Integrity, when on Wednesday, I saw **Senator Mitt Romney say with obvious emotion, “I swore an oath before God to exercise impartial justice. I am profoundly religious. My faith is at the heart of who I am. I take an oath before God as enormously consequential.”** (Senator Mitt Romney’s senate speech on February 5, 2020)

As this “Who Are You?” Worship Series encourages us to understand how our identities are very much connected to our Faith Relationship with God and Jesus, the Christ, our “faith is at the heart of who” we are. Something with “integrity” is stable - all the parts are supporting the whole. **We are invited to examine all the parts of our lives to see if they point toward the fulfillment of our identity, vocation, and call.** When all things work together for good, the parched places in our lives become watered, our saltiness never loses its taste, and our light is always shining for others.

When discussing our Gospel Reading and its reference to “Salt” and “Light”, David Lose said, “**we are again faced with the insidious temptation to hear Jesus’ words as requirement rather than blessing, as command rather than commissioning.**” “But take note: Jesus doesn’t say, ‘If you want to become salt and light, do this’ Or, ‘before I’ll call you salt and light, I’ll need to see this from you’ Rather, he says both simply and directly, *‘You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.’*” “**It is, as with ... (the) Beatitudes, sheer blessing, commendation, affirmation, and commissioning.**” (“Salt & Light” by David Lose posted on workingpreacher.org)

Kathryn Matthews cautioned how we need to understand what it means to be “Salt” and “Light” when she wrote, “**We can have a deeply personal faith without it being just a private (and very comforting), Jesus-and-me relationship**”: “**salt and light for the world means loving the neighbor**” “we have to deal with every day but also caring about the ‘stranger’ – refugees in war-torn countries, children who go to school hungry, teens who are bullied and the bullies as well, those who disagree with us politically (oh, yes – how else will we find common ground?), victims of violence and disasters, those caught in poverty and addiction ... and the world that surrounds us all, including the good earth that holds us and all of God’s beautiful creatures, all of these so vulnerable to our decisions, to our arrogance and our lack of consideration.” (“Shine” by Kathryn Matthews posted on Weekly Seeds)

Rev. Dr. Alan Brehm wrote, “It seems to me, that’s what Jesus had in mind when he told his disciples that they were light for the world.” “**They were to demonstrate the difference God’s grace makes in real human life on a daily basis.**” “And if you’re wondering what that means in terms of specifics, our lesson from **Isaiah 58:6-7** puts it this way: what God desires of us is *‘to loose the bonds of injustice, ... to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke ... to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them.’* It sounds very reminiscent of Jesus’ teaching in Matt. 25:35-36, ‘I was **hungry** and you gave me food, I was **thirsty** and you gave me something to drink, I was a **stranger** and you welcomed me, I was **naked** and you gave me clothing, I was **sick** and you took care of me, I was in **prison** and you visited me.’” Brehm concluded, “**When we live our lives in this way, demonstrating the difference God’s grace makes in real human life on a daily basis, we are living as light for the world.**” (“Light for the World” by Rev. Dr. Alan Brehm posted on <http://thewakingdreamer.blogspot.com>)

Finally, there is an important **Promise** contained in the last part of our Scripture from Isaiah 58:11. Revealing the result of being guided by God – of Living with Integrity, God spoke through the prophet, “***you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.***” That promise is Good News for each of us, who intentionally live our Faith Relationship with God with Integrity – who follow the example of Jesus’ Public Ministry – who are “Salt” and “Light” for everyone else in the world. Further, it is extremely Good News that our Divine Parent Promises to enable us to be “***like a spring of water, whose waters never fail***” for the benefit of others, who haven’t yet come to recognize God’s Blessings available for them, including the Invitation and Welcome into the New Faith Relationship with God. Being “Salt” and “Light” for the world is both commissioned and empowered by God. God’s Son, Jesus Christ, has demonstrated this New Life and delivered the Good News of God’s Invitation and Call to us and all his followers.

So, we return to the basic question of this Worship Series – “**Who Are You?**” You and I are **Blessed to be “Salt” and “Light” for the world!** We are also **Empowered to fulfill that calling!** Finally, let’s **Celebrate and Be “Salt” and “Light”** through whom our Lord Jesus Christ and our Divine Parent **Invite, Welcome, and Transform** many more people in need of that New Faith Relationship with God and New Life in Jesus Christ! Amen.