Matthew 5:13-16 NRSVUE

Salt and Light
13 "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be
restored? It is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled under
foot.
14 "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. 15 People do
not light a lamp and put it under the bushel basket; rather, they put it on the
lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light
shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your
Father in heaven.

Making Disciples

I wanted to take a few minutes this morning to talk to you about discipleship.

It won't surprise many of you that I'd pick this topic, since pretty much each of the 6 years that I chaired this division, I have complained that "Regional Services and Support" was not the right name.

The word, "Discipleship," more closely describes what the work all of our committees share, I think.

Now, the Division of Finance and Administration is a pretty accurate description, and the Division of Ministry Resources might be a name that comes close to describing what that division does, but, as I have said many times before, Regional Services and Support sounds sort of like a municipal department of public works.

Discipleship is defined in various ways. After looking at a number of definitions, I would put it this way: **Discipleship is learning to follow Jesus <u>and</u> helping <u>others</u> discover what it means to follow him.**

The purpose of a congregation is not simply to maintain its buildings, sustain its programs, or provide Sunday worship. These things can be important, but they are <u>means</u> rather than <u>ends.</u>

The deeper question is whether our congregations are nurturing people to become disciples of Jesus and equipping them to live their faith in the world.

It is a challenge that needs to be heard throughout the Church.
We can become so preoccupied with maintaining the institutional church that we lose sight of why the church exists in the first place.

This is where your Division mandate becomes so important. The mandate from the Governance Handbook is "to provide oversight, leadership and guidance to

Communities of Faith within the Region". Oversight, leadership and guidance are not ends in themselves. Our purpose is to walk with communities of faith.
To encourage, provide resources and training, and engage the people in our communities of faith to become disciples and for them, in turn, to make disciples.

We are the salt transforming our communities of faith.

The former Moderator, Carmen Lansdowne, has a publication called Church-y Conversations. Last March she wrote, "if we do not form disciples, we do not have a church. We have a justice organization with liturgy. Or as some evangelical communities in Canada like to call us: a glorified social club".

Of course, discipleship and justice are not competing interests. Our commitment to justice grows out of our commitment to follow Jesus. We work for justice because that is what following Jesus calls us to do.

Discipleship, besides being about an individual following Jesus and trusting him and learning from him, also means the activity of that individual in helping others to be disciples, also learning from Jesus and growing in faith.

Our work is not simply to support congregations in doing what they have always done, but to help them become communities that form and nurture disciples of Jesus.

In Matthew 5, Jesus says to his disciples, "You are the salt of the earth". He doesn't say, "You should try to become salt." He doesn't say, "You might become salt if you work hard enough." Jesus is telling his followers that they have a purpose in the world. They are to make a difference.

Jesus' followers are the people to do the job. Our Division committees aren't simply administering programs or providing services. We are called to help people discover and live out their identity as disciples of Jesus.

Let's consider the work of the committees in this Division and the important work they do: (this list of work is not comprehensive)

Faith Formation and Leadership Development and Children, Youth and Young Adults train and encourage new leaders, giving them the tools for leadership and challenging them to be honest confessors of where they have encountered the Holy and where they have doubted.

Stewardship is an essential part of discipleship. It challenges us to move beyond a mindset of scarcity and recognize the abundance of gifts God has entrusted to us. Through good stewardship, we encourage congregations and one another to participate in the work God continues to do in the world.

Affirm and Justice, Mission and Outreach help us to live out the call to freedom for all, the prophetic call to seek justice, and the inclusive love of Jesus. They

remind us that following Jesus means challenging the barriers that exclude, diminish, or oppress others.

Annual Meeting Planning and Communications, both have important roles in educating, encouraging, connecting, and prophetically leading the people of our Region as we grow in discipleship. Through them our light shines before others.

Quoting Carmen Lansdowne again, "The United Church has a tendency to be privately spiritual and publicly reticent". We keep our thoughts and feelings to ourselves.

Jesus said "let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven".

Jesus doesn't suggest that we keep our light to ourselves. He says we are to let it shine. Our faith is not meant to be a private possession. It is meant to be visible in the way we live, the way we treat others, the causes we champion, and the hope we offer the world."

Thank you all for taking on your roles in this division. Know that you are called to be the people for this job, to let your light shine.

Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world".
I hope that as you carry out the work of your committees, you will remember that you are doing more than providing services, administering programs, or supporting congregations. You are helping people discover what it means to follow Jesus. You are helping them find their light and giving them the encouragement and confidence to shine.

That is what discipleship is all about: learning to follow Jesus and helping others discover what it means to follow him.

I pray that the Holy Spirit will empower you with wisdom and understanding. That you will experience the confidence from knowing what you do is essential to this region and the Church. I pray that the Spirit gives you the creativity to find new and satisfying ways to carry out your work. May you see with wonder and awe the amazing things that God is doing through your efforts.
AMEN

Prayer:
Lord Jesus,

May the light you brought to the world shine through us.
so that our lives will illuminate your message.
May we be the beacons leading to You those who seek truth.

Jesus you said,
that your disciples must be the salt to this earth.
May we be the salt, participating in Your work,
giving flavour and life to the world.

May your Spirit surround us this day,
Giving us community and clarity,
So that we may learn and discuss, and grow in unity
As a division of this regional council.

AMEN