

Epiphany 5 2020

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

I realize that I am **not great** at storytelling. But I do believe that a good story, gets the message across better and sometimes people remember it longer. I think that this is at least one reason that Jesus often spoke in parables when he taught.

Regardless of how often that he used parables in his teaching, it is those stories that are passed on by the writers of the Gospels. To teach by use of a parable makes sense, as Jesus did not write these stories down. He counted on people remembering the message, seeking further understanding of the message, and passing on the message to others. How many of us hear a fantastic speech only to forget most of it in a few hours? It helps to associate that message with a story.

Nicholas Winton was born in England in 1909, and baptized in the Anglican Church by grandparents of German Jewish decent. He grew up to be a stockbroker. In 1938, at the age of 29, his friend asked Winton to forgo a ski vacation in Switzerland, and visit Czechoslovakia as part of a British Committee for Refugees. Winton was concerned that war was imminent and worried about the increasing violence against the Jewish community. In the city of Prague, Jewish

families had gathered, trying to get out of the country before the Nazis took over. There were 5,000 children, on a list, whose parents were desperately trying to get out of Czechoslovakia.

Winton decided to start a relief effort of his own which would require raising 50 pounds per child (equivalent to \$3500.00 today) to be paid to the British government just for transport. He also worked to raise other necessary funds and find foster homes for each child. He was only able to find two countries who would accept the children for foster care. The United States was one of many who declined to accept the children. Through it all he kept his job as a stockbroker by day, and worked on his relief efforts by night.

In total, he was able to save 669 children. Winton never spoke a word about his efforts. It wasn't until his wife found a scrapbook in the attic 50 years later, detailing his efforts, that he began to speak publicly about his story.

Vera Gissing, one of the children Winton saved, and now in her late 70s, puts the rescue mission in perspective: "Of the 15,000 Czech Jewish children taken to the camps, only a handful survived. Winton had saved a major part of my generation of Czech Jews."

Sir Nicholas Winton passed away on July 1, 2015 at the age of 106. He did not do what he did seeking fame and fortune for himself. He did what he thought was the right thing to do.

Maybe it is just me, but what strikes me in our gospel reading is that Jesus does not say; you can be the salt of the earth; He doesn't say that with the right preparation, you can be a light to the world; if you avoid sin, it can be possible for you to be the salt of the earth; or if you get your act together, you might be a light to the world. He doesn't say any of that. Jesus says; "You **are** the salt of the earth; and You **are** the light of the world. **No can be; no maybe; You are.** So, the question is not who we are; The question is how do **we live into** who we are and how do we show others who **they are**? Coming from the perspective that we are light and we are salt makes all the difference. Pure salt never loses its flavor. In Jesus' time, salt was picked up from the shores of the Dead Sea and many other impurities were picked up with it, impurities that looked just like salt but actually weren't. The pure salt was water soluble, so it would not be uncommon for all the saltiness to be washed away and only the impurities be left. Salt was used as a preservative to keep things from rotting. If we lose our effectiveness as salt; if we choose to hide our light and live in darkness, we become no different than the rest of the world.

Light equals hope, safety, security, and warmth. Light attracts. Light drives out the darkness. To be the Light of Christ is to be the Way of Love for the world.

We are like a city on a hill. Since we shine as lights, people **will** take notice. They will see that we are different. They will see that we are not like the rest of the world. They will see that we are truly who we claim to be, Christians who love one another. Over the past couple of days, we were reminded by our Presiding Bishop of comments by Dr. King and Nelson Mandela: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." Nelson Mandela extended that vision through this statement: "No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin or his background or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite."

No one expects that any of us will save 669 children from certain death as Nicholas Winton did. But we **might** have the opportunity **to** make sure that 669 children have food to eat so they can learn in school. That's doable.

I like practical examples. But also, not 'pie in the sky' ideas. Basic things that anyone can try. Gilly Cannon grew up in London and is an accomplished educator

and counselor. She has been a teacher, math coordinator, principal and founded and directed, the learning support department at Carmel International School in Hong Kong. More recently in the USA, Gilly has worked as a hospice volunteer coordinator, bereavement group facilitator, and designed and implemented a number of major projects, including Bringing Books of Comfort - a backpack of books that forms part of a community response to support children at a time of loss.

Here are some specific suggestions that she has put out there as ways for our light to shine brightly into world:

“1. If you feel Helpless; Look for ways to be helpful. Direct your attention to people in your neighborhood. See what needs are not being filled.

Donate your time and money to causes and charities that inspire you. Visit someone who is housebound with a Starbucks, a hug, and maybe some fresh fruit.

2. Find ways to Create and to Build. Do something that involves you creating, repairing, joining, connecting, or adding value to something...

Try choosing one of these and ask others to join you.

Read with a child. Create a piece of art. Visit a museum.

Bake a cake and take it to a nursing home

Help someone solve a problem.

Volunteer to paint at a shelter.

Plant some seeds in a community garden

3. In a world of evil; Focus on Kindness

Post quotes or pictures that inspire kindness, laughter, goodness and appreciation, at work, at home, or on Face Book.

Send an article to your friends about a happy story, kind gesture, or heartwarming scenario.

Call a friend or neighbor to check on them, invite them for coffee or tea, or to go for a walk.

4. If the news makes you feel terribly Sad-----> Take action to fill your heart and others with Joy.

Take a break from the news/Facebook.

Give hugs.

Play happy music, loudly and dance. Get out into nature.

Actually, go out of your way to Smile at other people.

Spend time with a friend who makes you laugh.

5. If you are feeling afraid; Do something that demands Courage

Reconnect with someone you've lost touch with.

Learn a new skill.

Share Jesus with a friend

6. If you are feeling overwhelmed by Hate----->Counter-balance it with Love
and Gratitude

Spend more time with people who value and appreciate you.

Communicate your gratitude to your neighbor, mail carrier or pharmacist.

Thank a co-worker, your spouse

Write positive comments on FB posts, newspaper articles and blog posts.

Compliment at least 1 person every day.”

These are all things that any of us can do. To be the Light; to be Salt in the world.

I want to say one last thing. No matter what you think about the events of the
past 2 weeks in Washington DC or how you feel concerning the results. When it

comes to being the light in the world; most of the time, it involves going against the tide of popular opinion despite personal risk. Senator Mitt Romney publicly voted, according to his conscience, despite what it might cost him. For him, it was a matter of Faith and a matter of integrity. And that meant everything. **It took courage.** There will definitely be times when we have to have the courage to stand on that hill and to let our light shine for Jesus despite the cost. It is what we are called to do. It is what we must do as Christians. To lose our saltiness is to be one with the world. It is very difficult to come back from there.

AMEN.