

Sermon Title: **“Salt, Light, and Social Principles”**

Bible: **Isaiah 58:1-9a & Matthew 5:13-20**

When: on Sunday, February 5, 2023

Where: about 30 people (plus YouTube streaming viewers) at Gilroy UMC

### **Opening Prayer**

O Lord, thank you so much for calling us to be the salt and the light. We are the salt of the earth and we are the light of the world. Please use our saltiness and our light for others, for our community, and for the world. Let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

### **1. Salt of the Earth and Light of the World**

I brought a small jar of salt. How did I know that this was a salt? If I looked at this carefully, could I tell that this is salt? If I touched this, could I tell that this is salt? If I heard the sound, could I tell that this is salt? Could I tell if I smelled it? What I did was to taste it. It was salty! Very salty. So, I know now that this is a salt. I also guarantee that this is salt. In today's Gospel reading of Matthew, Jesus said to us, “We are the salt of the earth.” The salt not of the kitchen, not of our house, not of the church, but the salt of the earth. We are the salt for the earth, for this community and for this world. How can we taste salty in our community?

I brought a small lamp. We already have lights and the sun shining in. If this were the evening worship, and if there were an outage, where would be the best place for this lamp? This lamp is so precious. Should I put this into my backpack, so that no one can steal it? This lamp is so fragile it could be broken. Then, should I place this far away from us in order for it not to be touched? Then, no one can break it. Is that the appropriate place? Where is the best place for the light? Jesus said to us, “We are the light of the world.” The light not of our

houses, not of this church, but of the world. We are the light of the world. Then where is the best place for us in this community and in this world?

## **2. “Christ and Culture” by H. Richard Niebuhr (1975)**

H. Richard Niebuhr wrote a book, “Christ and Culture” in 1975. I am not sure when I read this book, but my guess is that I read this book when I was in Korea. It shows the relationships between Christ and Culture: five relationships. Even though we cannot go into the details today, we can catch the meanings of the five relationships: Christ Against Culture; The Christ of Culture; Christ above Culture; Christ and Culture in Paradox; Christ the Transformer of Culture. In our history and in our church history, we can see all of these relationships. In the 21st century and in the United States, what is our relationship between Christ and Culture?

If I can modify his theory for the church and the world, it could be like this: Church against the World; The Church of the World; Church above the World; Church and World in Paradox; Church the Transformer of the World. We, the church, are the salt of the earth. We, the church, are the light of the world. Then, what is our relationship with the world?

## **3. Social Principles of the UMC**

What is our mission of the United Methodist Church? Our mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. This mission is not only for the pastors, but also for all of our churches. And as you know, the church is not the building, but the people—all of us. This mission statement is not only lip service, but also our prayer in body and in

spirit. So, our church has the Social Principles contained in the Book of Discipline of the UMC. The following is from the preface.

“The United Methodist Church has a long history of concern for social justice. Its members have often taken forthright positions on controversial issues involving Christian principles. Early Methodists expressed their opposition to the slave trade, to smuggling, and to the cruel treatment of prisoners, etc. The Social Principles, while not to be considered church law, are a prayerful and thoughtful effort on the part of the General Conference to speak to the human issues in the contemporary world from a sound biblical and theological foundation as historically demonstrated in United Methodist traditions. They are a call to faithfulness and are intended to be instructive and persuasive in the best of the prophetic spirit. The Social Principles are a call to all members of The United Methodist Church to a prayerful, studied dialogue of faith and practice.”

After the preface and preamble, it has six chapters: the Natural World, the Nurturing Community, the Social Community, the Economic Community, the Political Community, and the World Community. And it closes with our Social Creed. You can go to the UMC website - [umc.org](http://umc.org) and search for social principles. You can choose and read the details. When I wondered about our church position about social justice, I looked into our social principles, and I also looked into our resolution. Our social principles show our big picture or our direction, while our resolution shows very concrete explanations and action plans. For example, when there are social justice issues, like gun violence, abortion, and war, I look into

our social principles and check our resolution. I am learning our social issues and our church perspective. I agree with most of them, but sometimes, I have questions, and I would like to change or update our social principles. Please remember that this is not church law, but our church's prayerful and thoughtful effort for social justice, as the salt of the earth, and as the light of the world. Our social principles cover most of our lives and social justice.

The chapter of "the Natural World" talks about :1. Water, Air, Soil, Minerals, Plants 2. Energy Resources Utilization 3. Animal Life 4. Global Climate Stewardship 5. Space (Isn't it interesting that we also care for Space, the Universe?) 6. Science & Technology 7. Food Safety 8. Food Justice.

The chapter of "the Nurturing Community" talks about: 1. Culture and Identity 2. The Family 3. Marriage 4. Divorce 5. Single Persons 6. Women and Men 7. Human Sexuality 8. Family Violence and Abuse 9. Sexual Abuse 10. Sexual Harassment 11. Abortion 12. Ministry to Those Who Have Experienced an Abortion (I read these two parts when there was an issue about abortion in our country) 13. Adoption 14. Faithful Care for Dying Persons 15. Suicide 16. Sexual Assault 17. Pornography 18. Bullying

The chapter of "the Social Community" talks about: 1. Rights of Racial and Ethnic Persons 2. Rights of Religious Minorities 3. Rights of Children 4. Rights of Young People 5. Rights of the Aging 6. Rights of Women 7. Rights of Men 8. Rights of Immigrants 9. Rights of Persons with Disabilities 10. Equal Rights Regardless of Sexual Orientation 11. Population 12. Alcohol and Other Drugs 13. Tobacco 14. Medical Experimentation 15. Genetic

Technology 16. Rural Life 17. Sustainable Agriculture 18. Urban-Suburban Life 19. Media Violence and Christian Values 20. Information Communications Technology 21. Persons Living with HIV and AIDS 22. Right to Health Care (I read this part, as I hope for us to have a health care system regardless of our ability to pay for the treatment, and regardless of health-care coverage.) 23. Organ Transplantation and Donation 24. Mental Health

The chapter of “the Economic Community” includes: 1. Property 2. Collective Bargaining 3. Work and Leisure 4. Consumption 5. Poverty 6. Foreign Workers 7. Gambling 8. Family Farms 9. Corporate Responsibility 10. Finance 11. Trade and Investment 12. Graft and Corruption 13. Public Indebtedness

The chapter of “the Political Community” includes: 1. Basic Freedoms and Human Rights 2. Political Responsibility 3. Church and State Relations 4. Freedom of Information 5. Education 6. Civil Obedience and Civil Disobedience 7. The Death Penalty 8. Criminal Justice and Restorative Justice 9. Military Service

The chapter of “the World Community” includes: 1. Nations and Cultures 2. National Power and Responsibility 3. War and Peace 4. Justice and Law

Our social principles cover a lot of areas. Is there any topic that you want to read about? If so, please go to [umc.org](http://umc.org) and search for the social principles.

#### **4. Prophets’ Hearts Between God and God’s People**

To talk about social justice is always challenging. It challenges the status quo. Many times it is controversial and difficult. It makes us uncomfortable. But have you felt the hearts of the

prophets? When God called the prophets to speak up, how were their hearts? They occupied a position between God and God's people. They heard the calling for social justice. They loved the people, God's people. They wanted to be loved by the people. Some people might appreciate their message. But many people were against their messages, even against themselves. Many prophets were not welcomed. Many prophets were persecuted and killed. Nevertheless, our prophets spoke up. Our prophets could not stop speaking up. Would you have understood them? The hearts and the lives of the prophets who spoke up?

We are the disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. If God has already called you to speak up, please be thankful. And you are not alone. God is with you. And our church is with you. If God has not called you to speak up yet, no worries. I think that someday God will call you to speak up, because you are the disciples of Jesus Christ, the prophets of our God. At that time, you might be concerned, stressed, and afraid. But please remember that you are not alone. God will be with you, as God calls you. Our church will be with you, because we are all the disciples of Jesus Christ, and the prophets of our God. Be bold and speak up! We are all the salt and the light for this world.

### **Closing Prayer**

O Lord, we are the salt of the earth. We are the light of the world. When you call us, we are here, Lord. Use us for your kingdom. Amen.