

*I Have Come!*

Shepherd's Grace Church

February 9, 2014

<sup>13</sup>“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. <sup>14</sup>“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. <sup>15</sup>No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup>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.

<sup>17</sup>“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. <sup>18</sup>For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. <sup>19</sup>Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>20</sup>For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 5: 13-20) (Also 1Cor. 2: 1-16)

What is in a legacy? The two weeks leading up to the Super Bowl almost every sports talk show on the radio was focused on that question. Maybe the Super Bowl didn't have any other story lines that were interesting, perhaps the strategies of the game and the possibilities of winners and losers were simply not exciting enough to hold the attention of the listeners, but it seemed as if every time I turned on a sports talk show the conversation was already turned to this notion of legacy.

In the first part of the week just after the championship games, all the conversation was centered on Richard Sherman. He got a little crazy right after the Seahawks beat the 49er's in the NFC championship game! He stood in front of an ESPN camera and boldly announced that he was the best cornerback in the game! He took on David Crabtree, one of the premier pass receivers and outperformed him on the last play of the game to secure a Seattle win and he then got in Crabtree's face and in the face of the nation as he pranced about publicly proclaiming his professional superiority over all other players! It seemed as if his legacy was going to be his willingness to scream and yell at television cameras about just how great he was!

All the social media blew up...twitter and facebook and any other tool people could get their hands on in the hast of the moment, they all went crazy with Sherman's interview. People called him a thug, a

braggart, and many other names not suitable for printing on readable media and certainly none that I would repeat here! Through the week, Sherman stood by his statements and his teammates supported his claims. About Wednesday, after Sherman had a chance to watch his interview about 1000 times, he started to move away, not from his claim, but from the way in which he made the claim. He started to apologize for his exuberance and regret his boldness.

As Sherman calmed down the public relations team for the Seahawks went to work! They began to spin the positive attributes of Sherman's personality. They began to share with the media all the volunteer work Sherman did, all the charitable contributions he made, all the positive projections of role model he made for the children who followed the Seahawks. By the end of the first week, the Sherman story had settled down to something in the distant memories of people wanting to focus on the "Big Game." The naysayers and name callers were ready to move on to something else because Sherman and his "spin doctors" effectively quenched the cry for his public head! What is a legacy? Apparently, thankfully it is more than one incident in the largely unpublished life of a person who is just a little too amped up on his own sense of self-importance! What is a legacy?

For the past two weeks Paul has been introducing us to his letter to the church at Corinth. In this letter, Paul, the founder of the church, will preach to the people regarding several social issues they have raised as concern. They want him to address sexual behavior, they want him to address social behavior, and they want him to address religious behavior. As Paul pulls us into his epistle, he does not just lay out the arguments for and against for the people. Instead, he invites us, not by inviting us, but by very cleverly lumping us with the Corinthians and inviting us all to define who we are. Paul includes us in his letter in such a way as to cause us not merely to describe ourselves (Black, Brown, Yellow, Red, White) but to dig deeper and define ourselves. What does it mean, he wants to know, to call oneself a follower of Christ. What is a legacy?

Paul wants to suggest that to be a person of Christ, we must be of one mind! He does not want to say we all have to have the same opinion on every issue in our world. He wants to allow for the latitude God has given in creation when we were created with a freedom to decide for ourselves how God calls us to live in the world. In that freedom, however, Paul wants to remind us that there is one point upon which the whole of the "law and the prophets" hangs; "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and strength and mind, and your neighbor as yourself." Paul wants to suggest that this must be our mind! Paul wants to suggest that this must be our mission! Paul wants to suggest that this must be our mandate for publicly proclaiming not only who we are but whose we are! What is a legacy?

Today, Paul pushes us forward proclaiming his own personal ignorance. It is not his wisdom but Christ crucified that he offers! It is not his strength, but weakness that he offers. He comes with fear and trembling, just as in his letter to the Philippians he reminds us; "We must all work out our own salvation with fear and trembling." (Phil 2: 11) He offers not his own words of skill and solid craftsmanship but rather the sure guidance of the Holy Spirit! Paul reminds us that there is a wisdom in this world but it is not the wisdom of rulers and leaders. It is instead, the wisdom of God revealed to those who are willing to put aside their own egos and hear an alternative. Paul invites us to be among those with this kind of mind. Paul invites us to be of one mind and this time he is specific in defining that mind. What is a legacy?

The Gospel lesson for today helps us continue to consider that question. Jesus says, I have come! I have come for a purpose! We might refer back to the beginning of Matthew's gospel to remind ourselves of that purpose. In 1: 1 we are reminded that He is sent from God. In 1: 18 we are told that "He will save His people from their sins!" and in 1: 21 we are told He is God with us! Emmanuel! Jesus purpose is clear. He comes to restore a relationship with creation, a relationship that was broken with Adam and leaves us unavailable to God. Jesus' mission is clear. The question becomes, what does Jesus leave for us to remember him by? What is left for us, His Church so we might continue in His footsteps!

Jesus says, "I have come, not to abolish the law or the prophets." That tells us what He does not intend to do! He does not intend to displace or replace any of God's word or work up to this point. He will not remove the guidelines for right relationship with God that have been established by God! The first five books of Scripture, called the Pentateuch are also called Torah! Torah means "Law" Jesus does not come to super cede or to overturn the "Law."

There are some who hope He will. There are some who believe the Law is too oppressive, that it places too many restrictions on people, that no one can live up to the totality of the law! Inside the Torah there are 613 commandments that are intended to guide human behavior in relationship to God. In Joshua 1, the Lord says to Joshua and to all of us, "You shall meditate on these words day and night, never letting them depart from your mouth, then you will be prosperous and successful." Jesus says, "I have come not to abolish" this law!

What Jesus wants us to know is that the law is not too difficult! It is not too burdensome! It is not too oppressive! The law is love! The law is comfort! The law is light. In Chapter 12, Jesus is going to say, "My burden is easy and my yolk is light!" Today, we wonder! How can it be that 613 commandments from dietary restrictions to the way we celebrate the Sabbath are easy! It is too much they protested

and so do we! Jesus, however does not have 613 rules in mind when he speaks of the law. All 613 are important and all are necessary for the time they are given but in Jesus some all are fulfilled!

He said I have come not to abolish but to fulfill! He will say, "It is not what a man eats that causes him to be unclean, it is what comes from a man's heart. What goes in to a person comes out and goes into the sewer. What is in the heart determines the person." By saying this, Jesus fulfills the food requirements of the Law. He makes all food clean! He asks, "do you not, if your animal falls into a hole on the Sabbath, go and immediately get the animal out? What is the difference between helping an animal and healing a sick person?" In this way, he fulfills the laws of the Sabbath, reminding us that worship comes from the heart and not from prescribed positions regarding work and how far we can go to feed ourselves or others on the Sabbath day. The day is a day of rest and not a day of rejection! We are to be responsible to our family and our neighbors and to those in need at all times. This is the fullness of God's creation and this is what God looks at in Genesis 1 and says, "it is good!"

Jesus says, "I have come to fulfill!" The law does not go away because Jesus comes! The law is made complete because Jesus comes! There is no longer any need for temple sacrifice because Jesus becomes the last, the best, the perfect sacrifice! I have come, he says! As we hear, we should be reminded that He has come to "save his people from their sins!" He has come to become not just the good and pleasing sacrifice but the perfect sacrifice, the one without blemish, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world! His coming does not abolish but it completes the will of God which we know from John 6: 37-39 is to restore all of creation to a right relationship with the Creator! This is his reason for coming but what is His legacy? What is a legacy?

Last week as we began to hear the *Sermon on the Mount*, Jesus shared with us the beatitudes. As we discussed last week, these are not intended to be a complete list of those who are blessed, but rather an example of how we are called to live. The sermon is for us! We are the disciples. We are those who are watch as He goes up the mountain. We are the ones who wait while he sits! We are the ones who recognize His authority in our lives! We are the ones who sit at His feet and listen to his teaching as he begins to speak! We are the ones who are blessed!

What we learned in the first part of his lesson is what a blessing means! Blessings are not simply wishes for happiness. Blessings are not simply desires for good fortune! Blessings are an invitation to change! Blessings are an expression of hope from one more powerful than us that we will learn from them and be changed, transformed into something greater than we currently are. When we bless our food, this is precisely our hope. We pray that God, the one who is greater, will transform the gifts of harvest for us

into something that can be used in our bodies to provide the energy we need to serve and glorify His name! As Jesus offers the beatitudes, He blesses us, invites us to change, invites us to recognize in our lives that we have more to offer than we ever dreamed possible. As Jesus blesses us, He invites our transformation.

Suddenly we remember that we are the ones gathered by the lakeshore when He walks by. We remember that He calls and we respond. We remember that we left all of our own life behind and chose a new life. We remember that we were baptized into Him and the totality of life He calls us to and we said Yes! We remember that we have been poor, grieving, meek, merciful, pure, peacemaking, persecuted all on account of Him! We remember that we said Yes! We remember that we said YES! What is a legacy?

Suddenly we hear Jesus words again! "You are the salt of the earth!" As we hear them now, we know that we are His legacy! We are what he has left behind as an indelible imprint on the image of creation! We are his intended messengers to the world. We are the ones who are to leave the comfort of the center and move to the very margins of society. We are the ones who are to give voice to the issues of our day as we call out to others just as John the Baptist! We are the ones who are to say, "Follow Me!" We are the ones to say, "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven has come near!" We are the ones who by our example are to invite others to know that the law is fulfilled in Christ and not in us! We are the ones who are not to judge others but live by example so others might know the fullness of all Christ has done in us. We are the ones who are to say not 613 but 2!

We are the salt of the earth. We are to remind one another that when Jesus said He has come not to abolish but to fulfill that he has only two in mind! The two he leaves to us, the two he leaves to all are these: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind; and your neighbor as yourself!" In these two all of the law is fulfilled and in these two we are called to be his legacy. Jesus fulfilled them on the cross. When He gave himself as a sacrifice for each of us, He demonstrated His incredible love for God in obedience. He demonstrated His incredible love for us in suffering! He leaves as His legacy, Us! He leaves us as an indelible imprint on the image of creation!

We are the salt of the earth! We are the agents of change Jesus has left as a legacy for all generations! We are to be the ones who go into the world to change the world, to change the flavor of the world. That is what salt does. It blesses the food! It changes the taste, it alters the flavor! Salt is intended to add to and to increase the taste. We are the salt of the earth! We are the agent of change! We are the legacy!

As we come to terms with this fact, we must remember just as Jesus did, what we are not. We are the salt of the earth. We are not the salt shaker. We are not the ones who get to determine where the salt is placed. We are called to our community, to the place where the Lord has shaken us to alter the condition in our little corner of creation. We are called to this place to this moment to make a difference where we are and not try to make a difference in all places but to make a difference in this place.

We also cannot shake other salt. We cannot determine the work others have to do or the amount of work others do. It is not our work to shake other salt shakers. That work is left to God and to God alone. Our work is to be salt to that upon which we have been shaken! We can refuse to do the work given, we can refuse to be the difference God is calling us to be in this world but to do that is to lose our taste. Christianity is on the verge of choosing this path now. Denominational Christians get so bogged down in determining the actions people should take in their bedroom that they forget the people starving in the streets! So many want to send food and money and clothing around the world while they ignore the needs of the neighbor living across the street.

Do not misunderstand. We need to show concern for those who are hungry and helpless and homeless in all places but we are the salt that has been shaken in this place and together we can work to change this place so this place grows ever larger for God to the point where it will reach the neighbors we have around the world. We are the salt that must change the culture of this place and pray that this place will change the culture of the places next to it! We lose our sense of purpose when we fail to trust others to accomplish theirs! What is a legacy? What is Jesus' legacy?

We are the light of the world! We are the city built on the hill. We are available for all to see! What do others see in us? How do they perceive us as brothers and sisters in Christ? Are we different from the world? Are we the same? I believe the church is teetering on sameness. We build big buildings and worry about budgets that seem to fall short of the need we have and we pay more attention to how we do church than why we do church but we are the light of the world!

What if we let that light shine of the incredible ministries we are called to! What if, instead of celebrating the new restrooms that got built in our church recently we celebrated the people involved in building them. What if we remembered the Bacastow memorial Bathroom and the Osborn memorial outhouse not for the addition they make to our comfort but for the opportunity they have to involve others in labors of love. What if we celebrate the knowledge that their work involved some who do not come to church regularly. What if we imagine the light shined on those others, a light of love for our

congregation that could only be shown through the selfless and tireless work they put in! What if that is a legacy!

What if we let others see the good works we do and not take credit for those works but give all credit to God from whom all blessings flow! What if we think about the doxology we sung earlier and recognize in our gifts we have a chance to be a light to those around us, not so we can take credit but so we can give credit to the one who is our creator, redeemer and sustainer! Would that be a fitting legacy to Jesus? I believe that is exactly what He is urging us to today!

He says our righteousness must be greater than that of the scribes and Pharisees. We must be guided not by the rules of man but by the love of God! We must recognize that Jesus has fulfilled the requirements for reconciliation set forth by God and that we must now live to love one another! We are Jesus' legacy! Perhaps that can be our legacy!

When I think of what a legacy is, I have to think of my Grandma Dickson. When I was a kid growing up several of us grandkids used to stay with her during the afternoons on weekends. There were a number of us as she had 11 children! Sometimes Grandma would make bread pudding for us as a special treat. We could smell the cinnamon and the nutmeg. We could see the raisins and spices. We got to help tear the bread and watch as she mixed all the ingredients together. I can remember how the smell of the bread pudding baking filled the house even to this day. My grandmother died more than 40 years ago. I am sure it has been over 50 years since she baked bread pudding but I can still remember. I can remember the love and the laughter that went into its preparation and I can still remember the anticipation as we all sat around the dinner table just waiting for desert.

Remembering invites me to share a story I received not long ago. It seems there was a woman who was nearing death. She was discussing her funeral arrangements with her pastor and they established the order of service, the music, the obituary and some of the eulogy. As the pastor was preparing to leave, she said, "I have one final request." The pastor said, "What?" She said, when they bury me, I want them to place a fork in my right hand. The pastor, confused, asked, "Why?" She answered, "When I was a child and we gathered around the dinner table on Sunday to eat, at the end of the meal sometimes they said keep your fork! I always knew what that meant. It meant the best was yet to come!" The woman went on to say, "I want everyone who sees me to ask you about that fork in my hand! And I want you to tell them from me that it is there because the best is yet to come!"

My grandmother's bread pudding is a legacy! She baked it with the very best she had and she shared it with love. At the end of our meals as we clung to our forks we knew the best was yet to come! Today as Rochelle attempts to re-create that same taste in her bread pudding she does it out of love for me and a desire to help me re-capture the memory. What she does not know is that the flavor she creates has already accomplished all it could. Her effort to please me is her legacy. Years from now we will talk about it and we will remember. I will remember her love and the love of my Grandma and I will know the legacy they left for the world!

Perhaps as we think today of what our legacy might be, we can remember the love others have shared with us and we can find ways to share that love with one another and we can let that be our legacy! Jesus said, "I have come!" We are his legacy! Let his love be our light to the world! Amen!