

### 3.26.2017 Lent 4 (John 6:27-40)

A man named Charlie Moore moved into a new community with his family, and although he didn't know much about playing ball, he decided to join a local softball league in an attempt to make some new friends. On the day of the opening game Charlie took his family to the ballpark, and after helping them find a place to sit in the middle of crowd that was there to watch the game, he went to join his team in the dugout. A few minutes later Charlie got up to bat and when the ball came across the plate... he swung and missed it by a mile. The crowd was silent except for one little voice that said, "You can do it, Mr. Moore." The next pitch came and when he swung and missed a second time the small voice was heard again, "You can do it, Mr. Moore." Finally, the third pitch was on its way. Charlie set his feet, squared his shoulders, took one last swing... and missed. The crowd groaned, but the little voice said, "That's okay, Mr. Moore!"

When the game was over the family got into their car and made their way down the road. On the way home Charlie turned to his son and asked, "Was it you that said, 'You can do it, Mr. Moore?'" When his son admitted that it was indeed his voice, Charlie said he appreciated the encouragement, but wondered why he called him Mr. Moore. "Well," the boy said, "I didn't want anyone to know that I was related to you."

In our second lesson this morning we heard Jesus say, "*All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me*" (John 6:37-38). If our Savior Christ, the Infinite, Spotless Lamb of God came down from heaven not to do His own will, how much less should we as sinful men insist on asserting our own free will, much less believe that it would be a good thing if we did? Nevertheless, time and again we do, and I would suggest that choice is often rooted in a desire to be accepted by the crowd that surrounds us. If we learned anything in junior high, we learned that it isn't easy to be different – especially if it looks like you're cheering for the losing team and as Christians living in a culturally post-Christian nation we are well aware that's exactly how the crowd views

us.

Like the boy in the story we look at the current situation, we know what the crowd is thinking, and we choose our words accordingly. When we are here, within the walls of the church, among brothers and sisters in Christ, the words we speak are a bold proclamation of our faith in God as our Father, Christ as our Lord and Savior, and the Holy Spirit as the Sanctifier of the faithful, but what about tomorrow? What words will we choose when we find ourselves standing in the midst of a different crowd – a crowd that doesn't believe as we do? Will we use our freedom to do God's will, to speak words (and more importantly to live a life!) that identifies us as authentic Christians, or like the boy in the crowd will we choose our own path and speak in such a way that our Father can hardly recognize our voice and the crowd surely won't know that we are His children by faith in Christ Jesus? (Galatians 3:26)

It's not easy to be the person wearing the visiting team's jersey in middle of the home town crowd, and it's not easy to be the voice that chooses to speak the objective truth of God in a society where the majority encourages each individual to define their own truth (John 15:20), but God's Word Written identifies us as "*strangers and pilgrims*" (1 Peter 2:11) in this land.

Therefore, we must not allow the crowd that surrounds us to determine our identity. As children of God our identity is found God the Father who gave us life, God the Son who gave His life, and God the Holy Spirit who draws man into a covenantal relationship with the Almighty, Triune God of the Universe. It's not easy to be that one voice in the crowd, but it is only by the grace and mercy of God that we have been set apart, and so, as St. Paul declares we must not receive "*the grace of God in vain*" (2 Corinthians 6:1). We must not choose to do our own will, but the will of God who chose us in Christ Jesus "*before the foundation of the world*" (Ephesians 1:4), and though in the midst of the crowd we denied knowing Him, "*He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all*" (Romans 8:32).

It is the will of God for us as His covenant people to be distinctly different than the crowd around us that we may keep the light of faith burning in the midst of cultural darkness. Consider how Jesus clearly expresses that truth in

the Sermon on the Mount. This is what He says to all who deny their own will and truly turn to Him, *“Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt hath lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven”* (Matthew 5:13-16).

When we take a moment to really stop and consider His words we discover the incredible way God has blessed us in setting us apart, separating us from the power of sin, and giving us a new life that is distinctly different than the bland darkness of our culture. Jesus began this statement by saying, *“You are...”* The word *“you”* is clearly an address to every one of His followers. If you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior and made Him the Lord of your life, He is speaking directly to you. The word *“are”* is present tense. It describes you as you are right now – not as you once were, not as you hope to be some day, but right now. So, what does God in the Person of Jesus Christ say that you are? Two things: salt and light.

Salt was a most precious commodity in the ancient world. Salt was used to purify wounds, to preserve food, and to season a meal. When Jesus says, *“You are the salt of the earth”* (Matthew 5:13), He means that you are the purifying, preserving, and seasoning element for this earth. God has separated you for that specific purpose. So, He says, don’t let your salt lose its savor. Don’t be like the crowd that surrounds you, for that type of salt is *“good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.”*

The second word Jesus used to describe you was light. He said, *“You are the light of the world”* (Matthew 5:14). The miraculous truth to consider in this statement is that Jesus is calling you what He called Himself. In the Gospel according to John He proclaimed, *“I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life”* (John 8:12). You are truly the hands and feet of Jesus. You are called to do what He did – to bring the light of God’s truth, the light of God’s Word, and the light of God’s love into our dark world. Your light is meant to be visible to all, for *“a city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are*

*in the house*” (Matthew 5:15). So, don’t assert your own will and hide your light in the midst of the crowd, but do the will of God and “*let your light so shine before men,*” for when you reflect the light of Jesus in your life, when the world sees “*your good works,*” they will be drawn to God, the source of your light, and will “*glorify your Father which is in heaven.*”

We heard Jesus say, “*All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out*” (John 6:37). As authentic disciples of Jesus Christ we are His salt and we are His light. As such we must remember that on its own, salt has no idea where it’s most needed and light doesn’t know what darkness it is meant to transform. If salt or light assert their own will, if they decide where they will go and what they will do apart from their Master, they won’t be effective. To make the greatest impact for Christ in this world we must be filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18) and controlled continually by the power of the God for He will lead us where we need to go and use us where we need to be used. In all we do to purify, preserve, season, and bring the light of God into the crowded darkness of this world may the prayer of Jesus be our prayer as well, “*Not my will, but thine, be done*” (Luke 22:42).