



March 11, 2018

Reprinted from November 13, 2016

What Love Requires

READ: Matthew 5:13 (Common English Bible)

“You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its saltiness, how will it become salty again? It’s good for nothing except to be thrown away and trampled under people’s feet.”

REFLECT:

In his biography of John Quincy Adams, the sixth president of the United States, James Traub unfolds the life of a man who was plainspoken, simple in his wants, and a person of deep Christian faith. Adams lived according to principles he considered self-evident and never seemed hesitant to sacrifice self-interest for the sake of those principles. He was only nine years old when the United States was birthed as a nation. As he grew and matured, Adams became imbued with the conviction that the United States was the greatest experiment in government the world had ever known. So complete was his identification with that government, Adams never flinched at either the prospect of death or the, “wreckage of his career, so long as he believed that service to the nation required it.”ⁱ

When Jesus declares, “You are the salt of the earth,” he is not extending to us a compliment, though that is how this comment has become commonly used. What Jesus seeks are people who so identify with the purposes of God that they are prepared to sacrifice anything – including their lives – if service to God’s divine purposes required it. Jesus does not hold back or seek to soften his message; Jesus is warning us that following him comes with the costly expectation that we will be “all in.” Here, in his Sermon on the Mountain, Jesus lays down a challenge. The challenge is to adopt the conviction of John Quincy Adams that does not flinch at the call to be used by God to further the purposes of God’s kingdom.

This is where Jesus’ message becomes hard. Within each of us are forces that strive for self-preservation. But, if we are not prepared to lose ourselves for advancing God’s work in the world, Jesus is clear, we are “good for nothing except to be thrown away and trampled under people’s feet.” Essentially, Jesus announces that if we fail to be driven by the same convictions that drove John Quincy Adams, then the reason for our existence in Jesus’ ministry to the world ceases. We are as useless to Jesus as the dust under our soles. That message was deeply disturbing to some. Little wonder why people left Jesus in droves. What he taught was too demanding.

No one makes a financial investment if they are not deeply committed to seeing that investment grow. The same is true of relationships. Meaningful relationships are demanding. If there is absent any conviction of long-term value, or a commitment to the well-being of the other, a relational investment isn’t made. Yet, right here in this teaching, Jesus seeks an investment from us. For everyone who accepts his invitation, the investment will be costly. That is why our faith and love for Jesus is crucial. Unless it is nurtured regularly, the cost of what Jesus asks may seem too high. But for those who pay attention to Jesus, they will see that we are called to be “the salt of the earth” because Jesus was first, salt for us – even giving his own life on a cross because our life required it of him.

ⁱJames Traub, **John Quincy Adams: Militant Spirit** (New York: Basic Books, 2016), xi.

RESPOND:

1. How has this scripture or meditation spoken to you?

2. What insight can you apply to your life this week?

3. What one specific act do you intend to take, an attitude to change, a person to see, or prayers to pray?

PRAY:

Healing God, remind me that, in Jesus Christ, I have been invited into a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Open my eyes to opportunities to share your love with others and to advance your purposes in my own local community. Amen.