

OK, BONUS! You get 2 jokes for the price of one homily! An old rancher hates wearing a seat belt. One day he's driving on the highway with his wife and sees a state patrol car behind him. He says to his wife, "Quick, take the wheel! I gotta put my seat belt on"! So she does, and right then the patrolman pulls them over.

He walks up to the car and says to the rancher, "Say, I noticed you weren't wearing your seat belt." The rancher says, "I was too, but you don't have to take my word for it. My wife here is a good Christian woman, ask her. She'll tell you the truth. She doesn't lie about anything." The cop says to the wife, "So? How about it, ma'am?"

The wife says, "I've been married to Buck for 20 years, officer, and one thing I've learned in all that time is this: You never argue with him when he's drunk."

A police officer sees a car weaving back and forth down the highway, and he takes off after it. He pulls up alongside and sees the driver is a little old lady, and she's knitting as she drives. He can't believe it, and he yells at her, "Pull over! Pull over!" And she yells back, "No, it's a scarf!"

First, some background on the gospel. When Jesus says "You are the salt of the earth..." he makes a statement of the essential spiritual dilemma. We are something we often do not realize. We are a potential not fully actualized, a gift not completely developed, a high calling still in process. When we do not become who we truly are, we lose our flavor. The conclusion is: what is so valuable for the earth is now not valuable at all. It is not savored but trampled underfoot.

The direct address, "You ARE the salt of the earth," is designed to be convincing and to bring awareness. It is meant to cut through lesser evaluations ("You are a sinner" or "no good" or "mediocre" or "a loser") and establish this truth in the minds and hearts of those who are addressed. Hot on the heels of this high compliment is a warning. Stating these negative consequences is meant to galvanize our commitment to become the salt that we already are. This is the function of negative predictions in spiritual teaching. They are meant to invite us into different action.

We are also told "You are the light of the world." Once again, the direct address "You ARE," is meant to be convincing. The truth that people are the light of the world is as clear and unavoidable as a city on a mountain. As the sun is to the physical world, we are to the human world. Perhaps this is evident to Jesus, the one saying these words. But for most of us this is a stretch, an over-evaluation of our self-understanding. When we are scrambling to be noticed, to look good, to be seen as important, we are not living out of these words.

But we are told to "Let your light shine" (Mt 5:16). This means perform good works. When we do good works we attract people who will see in us not only our human goodness – but the presence and goodness of God. People who are light draw others to the Light.

These two sayings reveal our deeper identity. We are salt and light because God, whose children we are, is committed to making the earth and world something new, and He wishes to do it through us. When we become who we are, we also become transparent to the One who makes us who we are. "Glorifying the

heavenly Father” is the biblical phrase that recognizes this truth. How often do we think of our lives as ‘glorifying God?’ (adapted from Shea, ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN, p. 73-74)

Second, I think this gospel names a deep struggle in us – and in modern American culture. It is this: Parents want their kids to do well – best resumes, best schools, best careers, best scholarships, best pay – and the kids get the message -- and stress out over grades, exams, and getting into a big-name school. They want to perform well to please their parents and score points with their peers. Nothing wrong with striving to do well. Which reminds me – the University of Alabama football team played Harvard. At a party after the game, an Alabama player approached a girl and asked, “What school do you go to?” “Yale,” she replied. “Okay. WHAT SCHOOL DO YOU GO TO?”

What IS wrong – painfully wrong – is that there is often no equivalent teaching and stress that our students should do good, no matter what the school or career. To do good is to find meaning and purpose in life – and it has to do with being kind, generous hearted, and compassionate. It means that if ever doing well and doing good happen to collide, we choose the good. Now THAT’S a purposeful life. A HAPPY life.

The American landscape is littered with people who have done well but not good: doctors, lawyers, clergy, athletes, CEOs, politicians, celebrities – rich, successful people, provide daily fodder for the evening news about cheating, bribing, stealing, raping, abusing drugs, people, and trust. They did well, very well by our culture’s standards. They just didn’t do good.

On the other hand, a teacher writes, “Before class I sometimes sit in the chair of a student who is having a lot of trouble and pray that I might be a blessing to them that day.” For her, the small act of being a blessing to someone who needs it gave meaning to life.

A doctor writes, “Once I used to be one of the solid ones – one of the people whose purpose was clearly defined and understood. My purpose was to see as many patients as efficiently as possible in order to please the billing department. Period. NOW my purpose in life is simply to be the person who can pick up a phone and give you 30 minutes in time of crisis....I can listen to your complaints about your co-worker...I can look you in the eye and give you a few dollars in the parking lot. I am not upset if you cry...”

One man wrote that his purpose in life became clearer once he began to recognize the ‘decision trap’ whereby we think only the big decisions define our life. He says it’s the small ones that count the most. So, he says, “I have a great wife and 5 wonderful kids, friends from grade and high school....dogs and cats. I have a small business that I started and have run for 40 years based on what I now call as the principles of Pope Francis.”

One college student was driving after smoking marijuana and drinking when he was pulled over. He confessed everything to the officer, who saw that he was in college and bent over and whispered to him, “Don’t let your friends get you into trouble you can’t get yourself out of,” and let him go. “Now my purpose in life,” this student writes, “is to mentor, provide that whisper in someone’s ear that changes their life.”

Not everyone can have a great mind or body, but everyone can have a great heart. Yet, in our secular consumer world we tend to over cultivate the mind and body and under cultivate the heart and soul, and so we wind up, as Jesus noted, gaining the whole world but losing our true purpose and meaning, our souls.

Third, this is the difference in our lives of the resume and the eulogy. The resume recounts a person’s achievements. The eulogy recounts the person. It tells who we really were, why and how we counted, what we meant to others, what life meant to us, what we liked, how we acted, loved, helped, and lifted up – or not.

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Our tendency in an image-is-everything-society is to honor the resume that in turn is supposed to calculate and celebrate a person's purpose in life. But we need desperately to attend to the eulogy. Death has a way of putting everything into very clear perspective.

Jesus had the right idea when He spoke of taking the last place, giving drink to the thirsty, food to the hungry, comfort to the sick, hope to the imprisoned – the little everyday ways of being kind, compassionate, holy. These are the little everyday ways of moving from resume to eulogy, and Jesus taught that they would be the criteria upon which we were judged.

To answer the question of how we begin to create a eulogy after years of creating an outbalanced resume, we can watch a movie called "THE MAN WHO PLAYED GOD."

It is the story of a very talented and very wealthy musician but, alas, the worst possible thing that could happen to a musician happened to him: he began to lose his hearing. He was going deaf. Music was his whole resume in life. He thought it made him who he was. He was lost, crushed, and became very bitter and cynical. As a result, not only did he turn his back on his friends but also on God. With no resume, he became cruel.

Being rich, he moved into a penthouse and there he took lessons in learning how to read lips to compensate for his loss of hearing. From his penthouse window, he overlooked a park. He would look through a pair of high-powered binoculars and read the lips of people passing by. One day he concentrated on the lips of a passing young man whose lips were moving in prayer and determined what the young man was praying for and, being wealthy, he dispatched his butler to give the young man what he had been praying for.

On another occasion, he read the lips of a young woman who was telling her friend about something that she desperately needed and, once again, he dispatched his butler to fulfill that need. And on and on.

But this wasn't charity. No, each time he performed one of those services, the cynical musician would chuckle about those stupid people who thought that somehow God had heard their prayer. He would raise his eyes to heaven and laugh at God because he found it absolutely ridiculous that he was deceiving those people, that he was playing God yet he didn't even believe in Him.

What happened in time, as we might guess, was that, doing all those kind things, meeting people's needs, the man who for years played God, FOUND God and when he died and all was discovered, his resume wasn't nearly as impressive as his eulogy. He had found meaning and purpose after all. So may it be for you and for me. Salt of the earth. Light of the world. Amen. (last 2 sections adapted from FROM NO TO YES, Bausch, p. 178-181)