

January 19, 2025

“Salt and Light”

Matthew 5:13-16 NRSVUE

<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>People do not light a lamp and put it under the bushel basket; rather, they put it 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.

THE MESSAGE:

<sup>13</sup>“Let me tell you why you are here. You’re here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You’ve lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage.

<sup>14-16</sup>“Here’s another way to put it: You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this, as public as a city on a hill.

If I make you light-bearers, you don’t think I’m going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I’m putting you on a light stand. Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.

This is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

In preparation for today’s message, I recently read about two researchers who have been conducting experiments on salt.

Now we Americans consume huge quantities of the stuff in small amts. And it's in everything, if you read all the nutritional labels.

You know I didn't even realize what sodium was until college.

Just think about the last you time you hit McDonalds & poured even more salt on your already salty fries? Or maybe that's only me??

We consume so much salt that these researchers wanted to know why, Basically wondering what is the purpose of salt?

Of course the immediate answer is salt makes food taste good. It seems to bring out the flavor. But why?

Well these researchers report salt actually obscures many flavors of food. And yet we love it.

One of their theories is that salt makes food taste so much better because it masks some of the bitterness of Certain kinds of food.

Some of you who have been restricted to salt-free diets can probably testify, it is amazing what a difference a pinch of salt makes.

That's true in the Hendrickson household as Rich is on a low sodium AKA salt diet.

And it runs in the family—Janet Hendrickson, Rich's mom, made us smuggle in salt for her whenever she was in the hospital or rehab, and when she lived in the UM Homes in OG, because the food was so bland.

True story... she was sassy about it too if we forgot, or when we started quoting the "doctor's orders".

With a twinkle in her eye, she Always said a little dab does it every time—making this meal taste divine.

All of this came to my mind when I read today's Scripture lesson from the Gospel of Matthew.

Jesus tells his followers that they are "the salt of the earth," and then added that they are the "light of the world."

Disciples YOU ARE...a little thing like salt...

YOU ARE a tenuous quality like light.

And I always find it intriguing when Jesus speaks of the difference  
the people of God...his followers...make in the world,

Today using two rather small, often unnoticed,  
seemingly insignificant substances—salt and light.

I've already mentioned the impact of salt, and we also know that **light**  
is another important aspect from today's reading.

Light can be very tenuous,

but even in small quantities—like salt—it makes quite a difference.

Two powerful illustrations can help make my point.

The first is that every Christmas Eve when we celebrate the birth of Jesus,  
there is that dramatic, powerful point in the service when we extinguish  
all of the lights and then one by one we light individual candles,  
spreading the Light of the World-Jesus—who is alive & within each of us!

Each candle chases out the darkness that can sometimes feel overwhelming,  
each light quickly fills the entire sanctuary.

We can see the faces of one another.

The whole room feels warmer and enlivened,  
just by the tenuous light of many flickering small candles.

Another example of the power of light came when Rich and I  
visited the Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico.

During my experience of exploring those caves,  
as we descended into the darkness, I looked at the tiny lights  
we had been given to shine along our way.

They were just miniature flashlights, but in the darkness of the cave  
they made all the difference.

At one point we all turned off our lights, & the complete & utter darkness that ensued was like nothing I had ever experienced before...  
it was almost oppressive.

Our guide then lit a single match...  
and it was enough to light the entire cavern.

Oh friends, when the darkness is particularly great,  
One doesn't need a huge amount of light to make a great difference.

And isn't it interesting that when Jesus spoke of us, of our purpose...  
Of why you and I are here...  
seizing upon some metaphor to characterize who we are,

~He didn't say, "You are a great army marching into the world."

~He didn't say, "You are a loudspeaker put up in the marketplace to shout my message to everybody."

Rather, Jesus said that you... YOU are "salt,"  
And YOU...you are "light."

Small, tenuous perhaps...and yet both of these substances go a long way.  
They can make all the difference.

I think this is important for us to ponder for a while.

To think about what it means when Jesus calls his disciples...  
his followers--and in case you're not hearing it...

that means you and me... He Jesus is calling us salt and light.

Perhaps our purpose, meaning how we live out our God given call to serve... to live... to be in this world...

Perhaps our purpose always is to be **salt** and **light**.

To be that seemingly insignificant, often overlooked,  
yet surprisingly powerful substance set loose in the world  
that makes a difference.

And you know, just by their very nature, salt and light impact the world around them.

Put another way- salt and light are change-agents. Jesus says, "So are you!" Just by the nature of us being in the world, we change it.

Jesus also tells his followers that salt and light are supposed to be shared, not hoarded or hidden away or kept for yourself alone. No!

How salt and light are used are important. Jesus says in v 16 that as we live into our identity as God's change agents, others will benefit from it.

I love what the message translation does with this. Jesus says: "You're here to be **salt-seasoning** that brings out the God-flavors of this world.

If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness?

You're also here to be **light**, bringing out the God-colors in the world." God is not a secret to be kept.

We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill.

If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand.

Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine!

And friends, I have seen so many of you do this...

Living your life "ON PURPOSE" as God's change-agents.

When you arrive to work in the morning...

or at the first bell of school day...you don't show up in a gold chariot with the word "CHRISTIAN" emblazoned on the side.

You slip in quietly. You do your work.

You don't look different from anyone else.

~However, from the moment you stuck up for a different kid at lunch, whom everyone else was making fun of....

~That time you told a coworker who was experiencing a tough time in her marriage, that you were there for her...

~That time you helped someone who was in need and gave of yourself, thru a listening ear, or your time, your talent, your resources...

When you gave a word of encouragement,  
a check-in text or pop-in visit...

THAT was when you became salt...

THAT was when you became light...

You became the substance which savored a world  
which for another had become taste-less, drab and dull,  
perhaps even not worth living.

You became that light shining in the darkness.

You know...Jesus has put a great deal of trust in us,  
making us his salt and his light.

And isn't that ODD.

You may think that here Jesus might say "I am the light of the world."  
"I am salt of the earth."

Of course that may be implied...

(we know John's Gospel names Jesus as the Light of the world)

But the amazing thing is that here in Matthew's Gospel,  
Jesus turns to ordinary, unspectacular people

People like us...and says,

"**You** are light. **You** are salt."

And by the grace of God...you are! And so am I...

Today Jesus reminds us of our purpose...

How we live out our God-given call to serve, to live...to be in this world  
He reminds us to be salt and light ON PURPOSE.

Because—

- People are living lives surrounded by darkness:
- People with no faith...no church...no hope...

- People who are grieving the loss of loved ones...
- People who are struggling to make ends meet...
- People who are anxious and even fearful about what the New Year  
Will bring amidst a changing political landscape.

We need to be salt and light because:

- There are people who are suffering from addictions...
- People who have been hurt by a friend or family member...
- People who are dealing with life-threatening diagnoses & prolonged treatments.

And yet...and yet even when the darkness is particularly great...  
One doesn't need a huge amount of light to make a great difference.

A small pinch of love, forgiveness, understanding, and hope  
can season a life, bringing out new God-flavors to be experienced.

You are salt of the earth...So be salt on purpose...  
a little dab does it every time... making this life taste divine.

You are the light of the world...Be light on purpose...  
bringing out all the God-colors in this weary world.

May it be so... Amen and Amen.