

“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.

¹⁴“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵People 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. ¹⁶In 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.

¹⁷“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. ¹⁸For 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. ¹⁹Therefore, 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. ²⁰For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

You *are* the salt of the earth. I love this passage. I love that Jesus follows the beatitudes with this. He has already said, blessed are the ones the world least expect to be blessed. And now he uses these metaphors about simple, elementary elements.

And I love that the blessings and metaphors are all in the present tense. Blessed are you right now. You are salt already. You are a light today. Present tense. You don't have to change or grow or eat a teaspoon of salt to become salt. You already are.

It sounds simple, but salt is amazing. It preserves food. It enhances flavor. It is necessary in your body to transport nerve signals from your brain to your muscles. Salt prevents dehydration. Salt regulates blood pressure.

And it's essential in cooking. You can debate whether or not it belongs on watermelon, but you cannot debate whether or not it belongs on French fries.

But salt is designed not to stand on its own and be independent but to work within its environment, to affect other things – be it a basket of fries or the Atlantic ocean or your circulatory system. A teaspoon of salt is gross, but a teaspoon in a bowl of bread dough or spaghetti sauce is perfection.

Just like salt, we are meant to impact the environment around us. We are meant not to stand alone or to be bland but to enhance the community, bring out the best in others, help the body of people activate muscles and function. That is our purpose. Our mission.

And like a moth that is drawn to a flame, we are to be a beacon of light. We are not meant to light up our small corner of the world. Not meant to conceal the light and huddle around it for our own benefit. We are not to knowingly leave others in the dark but like a lighthouse keeper, we are meant to tend the light and keep it burning as a signal guiding people to home and safety, to be there in their stormy and starless night.

But let me also add one more thing to our translation analysis. Not only is the text in the present tense, but in the original Greek, in both metaphors, salt and light, our English fails us. It is not “*you* are the salt” and “*you are* the light.” It is you all, y'all, all y'all as they say in the south. You all are the salt of the earth. You all are the light of the world. Jesus, once again, is communicating to a community. Not an individual.

Together, we are the salt. Together, we are the light. It is *our* job, together, to serve and beckon home and enhance flavor and guide. Our job. Together.

And I want to talk today about the ways I see all y'all being salt and light already.

In the last year, you have embraced the potential for chaos when we added the playground, and invited the children to lead on the third Sundays, and through the Children's Worship Arts program, but it hasn't been chaos at all! It's been incredibly inspiring to hear their voices and see their enthusiasm! They've been salt for us, changing the flavor of worship and bringing joy, smiles, and laughter into the mix.

And we've started using a more structured, Bible based curriculum with the children and youth programs, and they've engaged with it beautifully. I hear about the conversations the elementary school students are having, and I'm blown away.

And the teens? Teen Time has grown from two or three students to eight to twelve students per week in the last year. They are bonding with each other, and they have asked for more Bible knowledge. Do you hear what I am saying? They WANT to study the Bible. They are a light for each other - a light for their friends who they are inviting to Teen Time. They are not hiding the goodness of youth group away. They are drawing others to it!

Last summer, we worshipped in the newly remodeled Chapel in the Pines. We love that sacred space on our church campus. We love worshipping outside. (Except for David Capaldi who comes faithfully anyway, even though he prays for weekend rain and grumbles when his prayers go unanswered.) It's a special place. We've had an Easter Egg hunt out there. We've blessed fifteen dogs out there at the same time. Martha Rice was married there in October. It's such a gift to have the Chapel. It's a light for the community. I find non-church members praying out there occasionally. Well, not now when it's 3 degrees. But when it's 75 degrees out, they're there.

We have a handbell group that has grown so large that we have more players than positions. Andy is just giddy to be stretched to accommodate everyone and find pieces that can include more participants. If you want to hear what that sounds like with everyone playing at once, you should be in your seats for the prelude on March 1st at 10 a.m., and I'll leave it at that. The choir and the bells are salt that makes our worship better. They enhance the "flavor" of the rest of the service.

The dresses that Sew Good Souls makes that clothe students in Lesotho, Zambia are a light to the world. The meals we cook for the Warm Shelter, and those of you who have started serving them again in person, you are a light to the community. Our mission trip to North Carolina was a light, too. We shine so brightly.

And our Christmas Bazaar is a light that shines before others. I listen to the other clergy in the area, not to brag but to learn. Their bazaars are cute. Ours is massive. And, as it should, it brings in more people from the community than people from the congregation. It is a light. Those who visit speak openly about how, if they went to church, this would be the church they went to. Friends, I want that to be shouted from the rooftops! I want that on bumper stickers. DCCCP – the kind of church you’d go to if you went to church.

But watch what happens when I say the following. If we are the salt of the earth, we’re supposed to be out there making a salty impact, right? Jesus says, if the salt isn’t salty, it’s useless. And if we’re the light of the world, we’re supposed to let it shine for others, not hide it under a bushel, right? We’re supposed to be impacting the community, drawing others to the light, telling others about Jesus. Right?

Well, that’s called evangelism. Being salt and light means evangelizing. Now, did everyone just cringe a little? Squirm a bit in your pew? Decide you’re ok not being salt and light?

Trust me, I understand the hesitancy to “evangelize.” Evangelism is a word that has been appropriated by a particular brand of Christianity and now means more than it originally did. Evangelism originally meant sharing the Good News, but now it’s associated with feeling particular ways about how to worship, who can lead worship, how to feel about women’s rights, how to be baptized, how to vote, etc., etc.

And the session members of the church have been wrestling with that word for a few months now. For many, many years, we have had a committee called Membership and Evangelism, but can you tell me, honestly, that the church was actively doing anything under the umbrella of “evangelism?” Did we have an evangelism team or a program that trained church members how to approach someone at the Stop and Shop and tell them about Jesus? No.

So, session debated what to do with the committee, and, at the same time, an idea to hire a communications specialist was gaining traction. And then, it occurred to the elders, evangelism is really communicating about who we are, why we do what we do, and who we love. And so, they voted to rename the committee the Membership and Communication committee, which will work alongside our soon-to-be selected Communications Specialist.

That staff person will create content internally, to help us be more aware of what is happening but will also communicate externally, to help share that information with the community around us. I think that the light that we are going to shine for others will exponentially increase as this team gets going.

But it's not just up to the future staff member and the committee. We're all supposed to be telling the Good News. If you feel like you have imposter syndrome when it comes to being salt and light, that you could never actually tell anybody about Jesus, remember the following things. 1) It's not all up to you. The salt and the light are us, we, together. 2) Jesus said you already are salt and light. It's not something you have to become. It's something you are, we are. So, congratulations! And 3) St. Francis reminds us that we are called to preach the gospel at all times, and only when necessary, use words. Evangelism is not about being aggressively preachy, it's about being salty and bright in our day-to-day living. In our scripture today, Jesus commanded, "let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." He didn't say, hear your good words, he said see your good works.

Call it evangelism or communication or being disciples of Jesus Christ, whatever you call it, we've been at it, and above and beyond that, I believe with my whole heart that this church is uniquely ready to meet the moment we're in. We are so salty and so bright, and I'm so proud to be your pastor. Let's stay lit, together. Amen.