

# Turn on the Light, and Pass the Salt

“You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world.” Matt. 5:13, 14

Matthew 5:13-20  
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

Rev. Todd B. Freeman  
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There's an old saying that we don't hear too often these days that was used in reference to persons who were considered honest, humble, trustworthy, and of good moral character. It was quite a compliment to say about someone: “That person is the salt of the earth.” With that understanding, think about those people in your life, present or past, that fit this description. It's an interesting saying that can be traced back to biblical days. Jesus used it in reference to describe both the identity and purpose of those who chose to follow him, his ways and teachings.

As recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, in a section known as the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declares to a large following of disciples, “**You are the salt of the earth.**” He followed that up with another declaration, “**You are the light of the world**” (Matt. 5:13). Let's explore these metaphors of salt and light.

A biblical commentary known as SALT, writes, “First, even in very small quantities, **salt and light can make a big difference to a much larger whole.** A pinch of salt brings a dish's flavor alive – indeed, salt is one of the only spices that can enhance and bring out *other* flavors in a dish. And even a little bit of light – say, a single candle – can light up a room. It can also dispel shadows.

“Second, **both salt and light have simple, elemental purposes.** As a seasoning, salt is, well, salty. No-one would use salt that's “lost its taste” (Mt. 5:13). Salt is for saltiness; its identity and its purpose are virtually one and the same. Likewise, light is for shining. No-one lights a lamp and then hides it out of sight!”

So, what is Jesus trying to tell us as followers of his ways and teachings? “In the same way, your and my identity and purpose - **who we are and what we're meant to do - are virtually one and the same. Like salt and light, God made us as a small thing that can make a big difference for a larger whole.** God made you and me to spice things up - not to overpower...but to enliven... And God made you and me to shine, as only you and I can: a [small] flame that can light up an entire room, or help dispel shadows...”

“Jesus isn't giving his listeners a new role to play here; rather, he's naming who we already are. **We don't have to work to become salt and light. [We already ARE salt and light.]** But we do have to claim, embrace, embody, fulfill, and live out what our gifts make possible. We do have to actually be salty and luminous. We do have to be who we are.”

Not surprisingly, College Hill is known for being a fairly “salty” church, certainly here within Eastern Oklahoma Presbytery. Yes, we have a history of spicing things up. And we are all aware that we are “More Light.”

Jesus, in the continuation of his sermon, will go on to provide some instructions (which we will begin to look at next Sunday) for how best to do that. It is always important to remember, however, that any and all of our good works are not to be seen as strategies for earning or acquiring God's favor or blessings, nor for our status

within the larger community. There's nothing we can do to be loved any more by God than we already are. That's called grace, and it something that cannot be earned. On the contrary, **our good works are simply the tangible ways we respond in gratitude to being called to further the ministries begun by Jesus.**

Let us, then, be reminded of the warnings Jesus includes in his teaching. He tells us that if salt has lost its taste "it is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot" (Matt. 3:13). **There is a danger in becoming irrelevant.** Likewise, as light of the world, a city built on a hill that cannot be hidden, no one puts a lit lamp under a bushel basket, but on a lampstand. That way, **our light shines before others, so that they may see our good works and give glory to God.**

We are blessed with an identity and a purpose. Let us acknowledge our identity, and let us fulfill the purpose to which we have been called. Or, using the salt metaphor, **we are not being told to become salty, we are challenged to stay salty.** There was an ancient Greek ethic that urged people to "Become what you should be." Jesus replaces this with the Christian ethic, "**Be what you already are.**" In Jesus' teaching, wholeness stands as God's gift at the beginning and not at the end.

Now, let me put this in poetic terms, using a couple of poems by **Steve Garnaas-Holmes.**

### Salt

You are the salt of the earth.  
—Matthew 5:13

You don't aspire to saltiness.  
It is who you are.

It's the taste of being an element of earth  
and an element of God.  
Your saltiness is your faithfulness  
to who God is in you.

The You of who you are  
gives salt to this world.  
It's a quality that remains  
even as it goes out into the stew of life  
and adds to its savoriness.

Be true to your salt.  
It will bring out the goodness in others.

### Light

You are the light of the world.  
—Matthew 5:14

Einstein told us:  
matter is just energy holding still.

Light is the energy of God,  
which is love moving.

"Let there be light," God said,  
and you were conceived.  
You are love made matter,  
Word made flesh,  
the light of God, the light of Being,  
momentarily here in this form,  
shining, radiating God.

You don't need to produce it  
or generate it. It's who you are.  
When you are truly yourself  
it shines.

The world sparkles  
with people walking around gleaming.  
Even on our deathbeds, we glow.  
Trust your light. Give thanks.  
Open the shutters of your lantern.

It is very important to note that in the Greek language, the word **you**, as used in the phrases, “you are the salt of the earth,” and “you are the light of the world,” is **plural** not singular. Yes, we can individually be salty and luminous, but **Jesus is speaking to us about our identity and purpose as a community of faith**. That means it’s not all up to us alone, but in partnership with each other, and with those within the larger community of Tulsa, and beyond.

Throughout this year ahead, as individuals and especially as a community of faith, **let us concentrate on reasserting our presence, our very selves, our identity and purpose, into the surrounding communities and world around us**. We must also remember that in order for our light to be seen and have any effect, **we must be willing to go where the darkness exits**, to engage and walk through it, so that in time, the light can overcome it. Therefore, a bit of risk may be involved – it always is. In doing so, let us claim our identity and purpose – our mission and ministry – by being and doing what we *already are!*

- **We are salt: enhancing, spicing up, and adding flavor to life.**
- **We are light: illuminating the darkness in and through our good works.**

So, turn on the light, and pass the salt.

Amen.

Resources:

*Feasting on the Word*

*SALT, Salt and Light: SALT's Lectionary Commentary for Epiphany 5, Feb. 3, 2020*