



Sunday February 6, 2023
Matthew 5:13-20 (Fifth Sunday after Epiphany)

Ascension Lutheran Church
Pastor Tony Acompañado

This past week Pastor Chris and I gathered with both new and familiar colleagues to begin planning for the 2024 Youth Gathering that will take place in New Orleans next summer. And like most groups who comes together to plan something, there's usually an introductory time to get to know one other better. So, prior to our time together each of us was asked to make a short intro video and then at dinner on our first night together each of us was asked to answer the question, "*Who are you?*"

I wonder how *you* answer when someone asks you that question? The most common answer is to give our name and also tell them a bit of family history and share the connections that help identify us. Often we'll tell something about our work, the things we like to do, and how we spend our time. I can't, however, think of a single instance when I ever answered that question by saying, "*I'm the salt of the earth. I'm the light of the world.*" How about you? Have you ever answered that way? Has anyone ever answered *you* that way? I'd guess probably not.

Why not? Even if we've never said it out loud do we ever think of ourselves in that way? Do we even know that about ourselves? Because Jesus knows that about *us*. Jesus thinks that about *us*. Jesus even says that about *us*. "***You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world.***"

In today's gospel from Matthew Jesus isn't talking to particular individuals. He's talking to the crowds that have followed him from Galilee, the ten cities known as the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan. That means they've come from everywhere. They've come to see this one they've heard about. They've come to listen and learn, to be healed, and to have their lives put back together. They've come in search of meaning, direction, and purpose. And you and I...we stand among that crowd. We are one of them. We too have come today to see this one that we've heard about. We've come to listen and learn, to be healed, and to have our lives put back together. We've come in search of meaning, direction, and purpose.

"You are the salt of the earth.... You are the light of the world."

Notice that Jesus doesn't say, "*You should be salt and light,*" or "*here's how you can be salt and light,*" or "*I command you to be salt and light,*" or even "*if you become salt and light.*" Instead, Jesus is telling us who we *already* are. "***You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.***" Within those words Jesus is declaring what already is. He's making a statement of fact. The language Jesus uses is intentional and is a statement of our identity.

I want to start here because I think one of the most powerful things Jesus can do in our lives is to speak a word of identity over us. To remind you that regardless of all the things that have gone wrong in your life and all the decisions you wish you could take back – what transcends every moment of brokenness or imperfection is that as a child of God... ***You. Are. Blessed.***

And I think what Jesus is telling us is, "Behold the salt that you already are. Behold the light that you already are and become that for the life of the world." Let them "taste and see."

To live as salt of the earth and light of the world is to know our deepest, truest, and most authentic self. It is the life we long for and the life God desires us to have. It is both who we are and how we are to be. That's why Jesus is so adamant that we don't lose our saltiness and don't hide our light.

To do so would be to lose and hide our life. To do so, in some way would even deny Jesus. Salt that has no flavor and light that is hidden are worthless. They are neither true nor authentic. They're not real. And that's neither what we want nor what God intends for us. No one says, "*pass the salt please,*" hoping that the flavor of their food will stay the same. And in just the same way no one walks into a room, flips the switch, and hopes the light won't come on.

If we *are* salt and if we *are* light then there are profound implications to being named as such. It means that we are to flavor the world. We are to season and transform humanity in such a way that reveals God to those around us. It means that we are to help people better see God's life in theirs. It means we are to enlighten the dark places of the world. My friends, you and I are the means by which God flavors and illuminates life and the world.

God has created us as the salt and light of his very being not just for ourselves but so others' lives might be enriched. The salt blessing that was poured into us – we are to sprinkle onto the world. The light blessing that fills our hearts and minds is to shine on and brighten all of life.

If our relationships are bland and flavorless, if our world is dark and filled with shadows, then maybe we've not been faithful to or trusting of our own saltiness and light. Maybe we've forgotten who we are. Or maybe we never really knew to begin with.



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So what does that look like? Unfortunately I can't tell you *exactly* because it will be unique to each of our lives. It will be particular and specific to our individual circumstances and relationships. I don't exactly know what you will do, where you will sprinkle your salt, or where you will shine your light, but I do know this. In whatever ways you do that, wherever you do that, on whomever you do that, you will reveal the very presence of God wherever you do. And in those moments they and you will taste life and see the world as never before.

What I *can* tell you with certainty is that what Jesus is asking us to do is practical and tangible. It's something that can be tasted and seen. And it will make a difference in the world.

- It's looking another in the eyes, speaking a kind word, and acknowledging them as having been created in the image and likeness of God.
- It's generosity with your compassion, time, and money to care for and make a difference in the lives of the poor, the hungry, the homeless.
- It's starting a conversation and rebuilding a relationship when what you mostly feel is indifference, pain, or anger.
- It's praying that God will bless with all the good gifts you want for those you love, those who have hurt you, those who are different from you, and those with whom you disagree.

The prophet Isaiah speaks of loosing the bonds of injustice and letting the oppressed go free. So maybe salt and light look like politics that aren't dependent on power and control, and instead on establishing equality and diversity, and recognizing the dignity of every human being.

It is faithfulness and commitment to others shown by listening, being available, and spending time. It may mean slowing down, rearranging your schedule, and valuing presence over efficiency and productivity. It's choosing a life of self-giving rather than taking and acquiring, vulnerability rather than defensiveness, and intimacy rather than isolation. It means you might, and probably will, get hurt. It is loving God, your neighbor, your enemy, and yourself.

Where is the salt and light in your life? What does it look like? And how does it show up?

Being salt and light will look differently for each of us. Maybe it looks like generous and faithful giving through a pandemic, or Spanish classes for ministry leaders and staff to build unity, or a Saturday morning gathering of men committed to deepening their faith. Perhaps it looks like the kindness of a stranger who jump starts your dead battery because your car sat at the frozen airport for too long, or people who come share their journey through mental health difficulties to offer hope to those continuing to struggle with their own. Or maybe salt and light looks like taking a meal to someone who is ill, or volunteering to read a Bible story in Sunday School, or picking up your grandchildren from school, or holding the hand of a friend grieving the loss of a loved one. What will being salt and light for the world look like for you? Whatever *it* is, it will always look like the life of Jesus.

So what are we teaching by the way we live our lives? Is our light shining – brightly or dimly? And what does that tell the world we really believe and trust? How are we seasoning the world and marking it as God's beloved creation?

Jesus calls us to live well-seasoned lives, lives that uncover God's light for others to see. *That* light shines, not because *we* make it shine, but because of what *God* is doing in us.

As salt and light, we are the sign that God keeps God's promises.

Regardless of where we are in life or in our faith I think we're all looking for the salt and the light within us and how we can best be that for others. We're all searching, asking questions, reflecting on our lives, and working to live faithfully with God and others.

My greatest hope for you today is that you hear that God has already blessed you and is promising to uphold that blessing for you and through you. ***"You are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world."*** So trust in God's promise and claim this blessing – and then go be salt. Go be light. And let everyone taste and see. Thanks be to God. Amen.