



Sunday, February 8, 2026  
Matthew 5:13-20 (Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany)

Ascension Lutheran Church  
Pastor Tony Acompanado

You are the salt of the earth; Jesus tells us in today's gospel reading.

I've been thinking a lot about salt this week. Mainly because my experiences with salt have been extreme to say the least. Our son Kai has an affinity for salt. I think it comes from my mom who would make sure every food on her plate was sufficiently covered with salt even before ever tasting it. Somehow this has become the norm now when my wife makes Kai eggs and allows him to "sprinkle" on the salt...I'm not sure why she began this new "tradition" because now anytime I ask Kai to take a bite of his breakfast I feel like I'm taking in a mouthful of oceanwater. And here's the funny thing...my wife has a complete aversion to salt. When a recipe calls for salt I'm pretty sure she sprinkles it on by individual crystals if at all. Thankfully my relationship with salt falls somewhere in the healthy middle.

As I was doing some research for today's sermon I came across the introduction of a New York Times bestselling book on the history of salt called "Salt: A World History." The author, Mark Kurlansky, reminds us that salt is the only rock that we eat, and its importance has shaped civilization in all sorts of important ways. We think of salt as something that we put on foods to give them a little more flavor, but the author tells us "*from the beginning of civilization until about 100 years ago, salt was one of the most sought-after commodities in human history.*" So when Jesus tells us that we are the salt of the earth, he's telling us far more than we might think. And the people who first heard Jesus say this would have thought about it quite differently than we do today.

It's hard for us to comprehend just how valuable salt was back in the days of Jesus. Salt is so common these days. When you go to a grocery store, salt will most likely be one of the cheaper things you buy. But that wasn't the case in Jesus' time. Salt was much harder to obtain back then. And much more valuable.

And salt was more *important* back then, too, because before there was electricity and refrigerators, salt was one of the main ways to preserve food. In fact, salt was so valuable in Jesus's time that Roman soldiers were sometimes paid with a salt allowance. Did you know that's actually where the word, "salary," comes from? It's also why, when someone isn't doing their job, we sometimes say "they're not worth their salt." There was even a common saying in Rome around Jesus' time, that "there's nothing more useful than sun and salt."

So, to be told that we are the salt of the earth is to be told that we are very valuable, and very useful. The world needs us. And for whatever reason, Jesus has decided that he needs us, too. As the salt of the earth, we're both valuable and useful – to God, and to God's world.

But there's another important quality of salt. Yes, it's valuable and useful. But not by itself. Salt is no good on its own. It's kind of obvious when you think about it, but salt is always used for something else. The salt shaker on the table isn't the meal. It's simply there to help flavor the meal. Salt doesn't exist for itself. And that's also true for us as followers of Jesus. Yes, we're valuable. Yes we are important. But not for ourselves.

As Christians, we're best serving our purpose when we're living for Jesus, and for others, not for ourselves. We're very important to the kingdom, but only when we exist for more than ourselves. Only when we exist for Jesus. And only when we're willing to be the salt, not the main course.

John the Baptist is a perfect example of this. He knew that he didn't exist for himself. He existed to prepare the way for Jesus. And once Jesus came along, John knew that his ministry was complete. In John chapter 3 verse 30 he said about Jesus, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

And it's true for us, too. Jesus must increase. We must decrease. We are the salt, not the food. Jesus is the food. We're just trying to preserve it and make it taste better. And if we're not doing that, then we've lost our saltiness. We've lost our mission. But when we devote our lives to Jesus, and to the world, then we're truly being the salt of the earth.

The old Roman saying goes, "there's nothing more useful than sun and salt." And in today's gospel, Jesus calls us both the salt of the earth and the light of the world. It's quite a compliment, to be called the salt of the earth. But maybe even more of one to be called the light of the world. Jesus says that he himself is the light of the world. And yet, here in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us that *we* are the light of the world.



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Take a moment to think about how much more valuable light was in Jesus's time, before electricity. Back then, you couldn't just walk into a room and flip a switch to turn on a light. We almost take light for granted these days. But to be told that we are the light of the world is to be told that we are extremely important, and very valuable. Jesus calls us to let our light shine, both in the church and in the community. And he challenges us not to put our light under the bushel basket. We all have a little light to share with the world. You might not think that you have much to offer. Not much time. No obvious talent. And perhaps not even a lot of treasure. But the Bible tells us that every one of us has exactly enough to let our light shine in this world. God has given to us exactly what God needs from us. Every light matters. Every person counts. And even the smallest light is a welcome sight in a dark place.

I think we can all agree that there's some darkness in the world today? Just as there has always been. We live in a broken and sinful world. It can be a fearful place. A discouraging place. A skeptical, angry, and frustrating place. But the amazing thing about light, is that the darker a place is, the less light is needed! The smallest flashlight or candle can light up a dark room. So remember this – no matter how small your light is, it's exactly what this world needs.

Jesus says to all of us, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. We use these well-known words at every baptism, to remind us that every baptized Christian can do this. We can all bring glory to God simply by letting our light shine. The smallest act of kindness, the simplest gesture of hospitality and welcome, the humblest sharing of our time, talent, or treasure – these all give glory to God.

We don't have to change the whole world to give glory to God. We don't have to fix all the problems of our world. We just need to let our light shine. And when we do, *that* will bring glory to God.

Now, this can sometimes seem a little overwhelming, can't it? We can feel like if we are the light of the world, the world's not going to get very bright. Because our little light can seem, well, little. How can *we* be the light of the world? We're not Jesus. He's the true light of the world. So how can we do that?

When I feel this way, I look at the moon. When the moon is full and the sky is clear, it's absolutely amazing to see how bright it can be. The moon can light up a dark night. But the truth is that even when the moon is at its brightest, it's not providing any light of its own. All it's really doing is reflecting the light of the sun. And that's exactly what *we're* doing when we're being the light of the world. We're not actually providing any light of our own. We're simply reflecting the light of God's Son. But when we're being the disciples God called us to be, it's amazing how much light we can offer to the world. And the darker the world around us, the more important the light.

And our world certainly needs a little light these days. And Jesus tells us that being a disciple means providing this light. You are the light of the world, he says. You and I are called to reflect his light into the darkness of the world. Called to let our light shine, but really not *our* light at all – *his* light reflected through us; through our words and our actions. We are called to let his light shine through our lives, so that others may see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven.

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

That's what Jesus tells us today. But you know what he doesn't tell us? He doesn't tell us to *be* the salt of the earth or the light of the world. He tells us that we *already are*.

In other words, all we have to do then to be the salt and the light is to follow Jesus. We don't have to be the meal. We just have to preserve the meal, and season it. Jesus himself is the meal. And we don't have to be the light, either. We just have to reflect it. Jesus is the light of the world.

So, my friends, let's not lose our saltiness. And let's not hide our light. Because the world needs both now as much as ever. And Jesus is counting on us, to be the salt of the earth, and the light of the world. To God be all the glory. Amen.