

## **Sermon – Matthew 5:13-20 – Epiphany 5 – February 5, 2023**

This is the second week in a four-part series walking through one of Jesus' most famous sermons, the so-called "Sermon on the Mount." We will follow the last two parts in the next two weeks.

As we read in last week's gospel, Jesus has just proclaimed the surprising news that many of his listeners are actually among those graciously blessed by God. And now Jesus makes this idea even more explicit. He addresses his audience directly, using the second person: "You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world." *God has made you, and blessed you, for a particular role in creation's restoration.*

There is so much in this reading.. Salt, light, the law... and I attempted to address most of it...realized I was stretching, so then decided to stick with salt.

Having said that, I do have a few words to say about light. The job of light is not to draw attention to itself - it is there to allow people to see things that would otherwise be hidden in the darkness. Think of a flashlight. We don't look directly at the flashlight or into the beam of light but we look at what is being highlighted. When Jesus says "You are the light of the world" he is not bringing attention to you but asks you to be the light in the dark corners of our world...of which there are many....

But back to salt!

Our Gospel reading needs to be taken closely with the verses which precede them. (You remember the 9 “Blessed are the... Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn,...) They continue the theme. To shine as a light, or to be salt, is to be living out the attitudes embraced in the beatitudes.

So, I have to tell you one of my salt stories (and as a NL there’s more than one!).

*NB, Bible study that always had lunch together. One person would prepare. I decided to make Cod au gratin. Cod fish in a creamy white sauce (a roux) topped with shredded cheddar cheese. Normally made with salted cod which would be rendered out some. I didn’t have any salted cod so I went to my trusty Internet and, for the amount of fish I had it was recommended I use 6 teaspoons of salt.*

*Prepared the dish*

*Sat at parishioners house, after waiting for everyone to taste it I tasted it. It was briny. I had used 6 tablespoons of salt. It was unbearably briny. And these parishioners sitting around that table were praising me on how good it was. They lied! Because they couldn’t tell the minister it was terrible.*

“You are the salt of the earth.” That’s where Jesus starts this part of Matthew 5. Salt, of course, is one of the most sublime as well as one of the most ancient of all cooking spices and additives. Sodium chloride is the only mineral that we human beings take directly from the earth and eat. We would die without salt, but we’d also find a good bit of otherwise tasty food to be dull and lifeless were it not for salt. Perhaps that’s why in history some cultures exchanged salt as

money. The earliest roads were built to transport salt, the earliest taxes were levied on it, whole military campaigns were launched to secure salt. Salt gave Venice its start as a commercial trading empire in Europe and it helped Gandhi bring India to independence in the mid-twentieth century.

Salt is indispensable to good food. When used thoughtfully, it sharpens and defines flavors and aromas, it melds flavors in ways that transform bland dishes into something complex and wonderful. Salt controls the ripening of cheese, strengthens the gluten in bread, preserves meats, and just generally provides what Robert Farrar Capon called the “music of cookery, the indispensable bass line over which all tastes and smells form their harmonies.” Of course, even so, salt needs to be used well. Few things are more disappointing than finishing a dish at the stove only to remember too late that you forgot to add any salt. Then again, nothing can ruin a soup – or cod au gratin - faster than too much salt.

“You are the salt of the earth,” Jesus said to his disciples. (Note: Jesus did not say to *become* salt but that by virtue of being a disciple, each of us just **IS** salt.) It was a striking image then and it’s a striking one now, but what does it imply for the life of discipleship? Well, I just mentioned the good effect salt has on the food we eat. Of course, to get that tasty effect, you have to mix the sodium chloride *into* the food. How foolish it would be to think that just having a box of kosher salt next to the stovetop will make a difference even if you never sprinkle it into the soup. If you ask a cook, “Did you add any salt?”, then the answer had better not be, “No, but I have a box of it close by. Isn’t that enough?”

Following hard on the heels of his Beatitudes, Jesus is saying that if you're going to live those grace-filled attitudes of the Beatitudes, then it's not enough to work inside the church community, it's not enough to nurture a strong interior life of spirituality. No, the result of all your piety must be pouring yourself out onto this earth so as to bring out life's complex and beautiful flavors.

The right amount of salt brings out the best taste, the goodness. Bringing the right amount of grace, love, peace and compassion to each other's lives brings out the good in each other.

Like salt, we are not to overwhelm the world - but to bring out the goodness - or preserve the goodness that we find in it.

God made you to spice things up — not to overpower the dish, but to enliven it, enhancing and highlighting its other flavors.

Jesus looks at the people before Him – those who had followed him to this hillside - and says “*You are the salt of the earth...*” “*You are light for the world...*” *God made you to bless the world! You may feel small and insignificant, but like a pinch of salt or a spark of light, you can make a tremendous difference. Go boldly, then, and be who you are!*

Our role as salt and light for the world is something we are called to do now - however imperfectly. The little flavour we bring - the small light we can offer - all make a difference to the world. Without us - life is tasteless and dull!