

“salt... light... commandments”
A Sermon for the Federated Church of Thomaston
Thomaston, Maine
Sunday, February 9, 2020
Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet
Scripture: Matthew 5:13-20

“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 underfoot.

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In 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.

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For 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. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called the least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”
Matthew 5:13-20

Will you pray with me. Holy God, what are you going to do with us? Fortunately you seem to care for us enough that you never give up on us, no matter how much we stumble. Help us to take in your word this day that we might taste a bite of your sustenance and then crave more of it. Amen.

(take off stole and put on wrap) Brothers and sisters! May the peace of God be with you all this day! When you heard last week of my teachings concerning those most blessed in God’s household, you might have wondered how you fit into all of this “sermon on the mount,” as it came to be known by the Gospel writer.

You might not have found an opening into which you could walk and say, “Yes! I’m there! I’m the one who is poor in spirit, or I know someone who is.

I am the one who mourns, or I know someone who does!

I am the meek, or I know someone who feels like that!

I am the one who hungers and thirsts for righteousness, or I have read of someone or know of someone who does!

No, you might not have related to any of that. And you might have said to yourself, “I am certainly not one of the *pure in heart*! My thoughts are way too impure some days to be called ‘pure in heart’! I’m not even so sure I can do *any* of what you call me to do, for I am afraid and too human.”

Truly I tell you, brothers and sisters... Do not be discouraged.

I know your fears and apprehensions.

I know your frailties and your faults.

I know all of that, so there’s no point in trying to deny any of it, or hide it from me, or use it as an excuse for why you are not worthy of God’s attention.

But today, brothers and sisters, I am here to tell you that YOU are the salt of the earth! (Matt 5:13) Yes, don't shake your heads no! *Each* of you are the salt of the earth. I don't mean you could *become* the salt of the earth, or that you *show some tendencies* toward saltiness. You... are... the salt... of the earth!

And you ask, "What does that mean?" Truly I tell you...

Salt is what gives zest to life.

Salt is what makes everything taste better.

Salt is essential for living.

Salt is the sign of hospitality when bread is dipped in it and passed to another.

Salt is a renewer of life.

Salt is a preserver of life. Without salt... life would not go on.

And yet... and yet... if salt loses its saltiness, it is useless. Bland, tasteless salt just... lays there. It is simply a white grainy powder with no punch, no power, no zest. I know, I know... some days you feel like white grainy powder with no punch, no power, no zest.

I feel like that myself some days...

when people refuse to understand what I'm trying to teach them,

when people seem to be blind to the power of God in their lives,

when all looks dim and dreary and I'm feeling too tired to even put on my sandals in the morning.

But brothers and sisters, truly I tell you, your saltiness can be renewed so that *you* can be renewing for others. Maybe you need a little *new* salt to mix with yours –

maybe a little more reading of the Bible each day;

maybe a little more conversation with one another about what all of this means;

maybe, dare I say it, what you need to do is go out and talk with someone...

anyone... who seems sad, or feeling bad in any way.

Truly I tell you, if you go out of your way for another, you will find your saltiness renewed. I guarantee that.

You will find new zest within yourself you didn't know you had to begin with. I promise you that.

You will find new energy to begin each day with these questions on your minds and in your hearts,

"What can I do this day to bring a smile to another?"

"What can I do this day to bring zest to someone's lingering life?"

What can I do this day to remind another that they are not alone in their troubles?"

"What can I do this day to remind myself that I am the salt of the earth, the essence of what God calls me to be for God's people?"

O.K., I've tried to make my point. Perhaps some of you still don't believe it. So here's another way to look at it. Truly I tell you, brothers and sisters, "*You* are the light of the world." (Matthew 5:14)

You shine in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome you. Gospel writer John proclaimed that of you, of me, of God's self.

You are the light of God shining where people believe there is no light...

when illness has robbed them of their bodies...
when circumstances of life have brought them into dark tunnels of despair...
when the chaos of the world has weighed them down and they see no hope for a better tomorrow.

Truly I tell you, brothers and sisters, you are the light of God in the world. You shine forth as evidence that God is alive and well, even in the midst of terrible times, dangerous times, sick times.

You shine from hilltops so people can see you as they see the planet Jupiter in the morning sky.

You shine in the barrels of seemingly bottomless loss of hope and the baskets of bunk they tell themselves about how worthless they are.

You shine, you give light, you glow with God so that others will not lose hope and will not drown in despair, but will be given life and renewed spirit from within and without.

The light from the candle burning brightly within you will light the candle of another whose wick has gone dry, and become brittle.

Yes, I know, I know... Some days *your* wick feels as if it has gone dry. Mine, too.... Some days I can barely stand and try to give light. But with a little shaving of wick and prayer, a little straightening of candle and reading of the trials and challenges of the prophets of old, I feel renewed. You can be, too.

Truly I tell you, brothers and sisters, I would not say these things to you if they were not true,

if they were not God's desires for you,
if they were not the holy substance of life burrowed into your hearts and minds before you were born,

before you were a twinkle in your parents eyes,
before you were snuggled in your mothers' wombs.

Brothers and sisters, you are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. You have so much to give, so much to do, so much to share.

I believe that the great Russian author Dostoyevsky was right. He wrote, "Sometimes, even if we have to do it alone and our conduct seems to be crazy, we must set an example and so draw the souls of others out of their solitude and spur them to some act of kindred love, so that the great idea may not die."¹

You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. Do not forget or lose sight of your amazing worth in God's eyes.

I must go for now. Let the people say, "Amen."

¹Adapted from the words of Fyodor Dostoyevsky quoted in *The Gospel of Dostoyevsky*.