

Being Salt and Light

Matthew 5:13-16

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You are the salt of the earth. But what if salt were to lose its flavor? How could you restore it? It would be fit for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

You are the light of the world. You don't build a city on a hill, then try to hide it, do you? You don't light a lamp, then put it under a bushel basket, do you? No, you set it on a stand where it gives light to the whole house. In the same way, your light must shine before others so that they may see your good actions and give praise to Abba God.

Matthew 5:13-16

The Inclusive Bible

Our passage is the next section in what is often referred to as the Sermon on the Mount. Most likely Matthew 5 -7 was a collection of Jesus' sayings and teachings that were later edited together. Jesus would have needed a very long scroll with his sermon notes. People would have become restless with a long sermon.... unlike today.

Last week I focused on the blessings Jesus offers. The Beatitudes remind us that people aren't blessed because of their success, their wealth, or their power. They are blessed because God is with them and for them. It is a reminder that the Holy One brings hope to the seemingly hopeless. These blessings speak a counter message to those who assume they can use their power to exploit, to those who benefit from injustice and pain, and to those who try to earn their own blessing. One description offered last week is that the litany of blessings is a Christ-consciousness, an invitation to deeper awareness of this reality within us and to live our lives from this place.

After we get the "*blessed are*" verses, Jesus tells us we are *salt of the earth* and *light to the world*. Living out the beatitudes, being blessing to the world, is part of how we are salt and light. Light is an image we explore frequently and understand more intuitively, perhaps, than the image of salt so I am keep my focus on salt today.

Salt has held such value in history. Roads were paved just to trade it, and the Latin word that gives us "salary" comes from the word "salt." Salt has been extracted from the earth and from the ocean for thousands of years, and its value has often been equal to precious metals.

Salt is necessary for life. It's a primary taste for humans. We often notice salt by its absence, or when there is too much. The "just right" amount of salt goes unnoticed.

If being blessed is being salt of the earth, *it means being the ingredient that is valuable and gives life, but isn't shiny and calling attention to itself.*

Salt is not like other spices and seasonings. I like some of the ways Rev. Marci Glass writes about this teaching. (1)

God doesn't call us to be spicy like *cayenne pepper*, although maybe there are times we are invited to be bold.

God doesn't call us to be dramatic like *saffron*, which only takes a pinch to change the color of an entire dish—visible to everyone.

God doesn't call us to be the *whole enchilada* either. We are one ingredient among many, a part of a bigger enterprise. Nobody serves a bowl of salt as a complete meal. We aren't the only thing that can feed the world, but without the salt of God's blessed and Beloved community, the world is missing flavor and an important nutritional component.

Once salt is added to a dish, it can't be removed, and it loses its shape. Salt dissolves into broth. It disappears into dishes. Perhaps we have to be willing to let go of our egos and agendas we hold if we want to be a blessing and salt of the earth.

God doesn't call us to be *Bay Leaves for the world*, which seasons a dish, but then is removed, intact, before the dish is served.

So how does salt work? Maybe those descriptions of who being blessed by God - *poor in spirit, mourners, meek, hungry for justice, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, persecuted*—are actually the parts of people's lives, our lives, that settle down into the cracks and crevices of our lives like salt, invisible to the eye in most cases, mixing in and dissolving into our core being.

"She was a salt of the earth kind of person. He was an authentic, salt of the earth man." That is a description I hear people say sometimes about someone they love or admire. Often, it isn't until a loved one has died that we realize the way they were salt and light, the way they were blessing in our lives. It is in their absence that we notice the taste of the recipe of our lives has gone a little flat and bland. Think about how salt might show up.

Remember that our tears are salty. Our tears may come in unexpected moments.

May our tears season our memories.

May our salty tears lead us through grief and into joy.

May our tears for people who are hurting or suffering remind us that being salty means

feeling compassion, empathy, & love, and holding a vision of the Beloved Community.

You are the salt of the earth. But being salt doesn't come naturally to many of us. Maybe we don't want to dissolve. We want to loudly share our opinions.

And yet, God has called us, again and again, to live in community, to care for common welfare more than for private rights. Again and again, God reminds us to embrace God's vision. And so I work at being salt.

In her poem, "Kindness," Naomi Shihab Nye writes:

Before you know what kindness really is
you must lose things,
feel the future dissolve in a moment
like salt in a weakened broth.
What you held in your hand,
what you counted and carefully saved,
all this must go so you know
how desolate the landscape can be
between the regions of kindness....

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.
You must wake up with sorrow.
You must speak to it till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.

Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day to gaze at bread,
only kindness that raises its head
from the crowd of the world to say
It is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you everywhere
like a shadow or a friend.

(The entire poem can be found [here](#).)

I think the kindness she speaks of in the poem is not unlike the blessedness Jesus offers in the sermon on the mount. It is subtle. We notice it most by its absence, and it dissolves like salt in a broth, seasoning our lives with mercy, love, compassion, and justice.

Jesus taught us about blessedness. Blessed are..... Do we let these blessings move into the cracks and crevices of who we are and flow out into the world?

Maybe the blessing is this: We are beloved by God who gives hope to the hopeless. We know the Divine Mystery who loves the unlovable. We know this Source of Love who comforts the sorrowful. We know the One known by many names welcomes the outcast and the stranger. And we know God who has planted this same power and presence within us. Within every one of us.

And for this blessing, may our prayer be, "We are salt of the earth. Use us." Amen.

1) Rev. Marci Glass, "Dissolve Like Salt," 11.2.2020 Glass Overflowing blog
<https://marciglass.com/2020/11/02/dissolve-like-salt-2/>