

Sermon February 8, 2026

Light of the world. Candles

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 hidden. 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 fulfil. 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 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.

Salt & Light

Jesus has a lot to say today. "You are the light of the world" he proclaims. "Let your light shine!" We've heard a lot about light lately - From Genesis to Isaiah to Jesus, light is a symbol that we understand. We're in familiar territory. Light penetrating through the darkness. Good and blessed by God. We light our candles. We turn towards the bright light... and we hope.

But that's not all that Jesus said that day. "You are the salt of the earth." Salt and light - these are the requirements of discipleship.

Salt is everywhere. But, salt was viewed very differently in Jesus' time. Back then salt was rare, hard to find, and considered a very precious commodity. Think about that as you hear the words "You are the salt of the earth." "

You are rare and precious and necessary for life"

Salt in those days was used for a variety of things: in addition to seasoning, preserving and preparing foods, it was used to purify offerings and heal wounds.

Jesus is telling his followers that he expected something extraordinary from them for the sake of God. He placed a high value on them and on what he required of them - just as the first-century culture placed a very high value on salt. He taught his followers to act for God in ways as important and varied as salt was in their world.

Being salt to the world means helping others learn to make life special, to keep life from being bland and unrewarding. We season the world with an understanding of God's love and the commitment of faith... and then we go on to purify it and preserve it for all people. Being salt to the world means adding flavor to life wherever and whenever possible, but it also means acting as a healing agent. To make the world a better place in all ways. It means pursuing meaning in all we do and in all we encounter. It means acting in love with all whom we touch.

Just as light penetrates the darkness and changes our perceptions, salt changes the very nature of things.

Jesus' charge for the disciples to become his salty, light-filled followers came immediately after the beatitudes. We read these scriptures on different weeks, but this was all part of one teaching. The seasoning and the light should reflect the values he taught - the blessings and honor for those on the outskirts of society. Jesus commands us to make a difference in the world.

We are called to do all things in love.

Today, Jesus empowers us to purify, to heal, to nurture. We are sent out to thaw the frozen, to preserve God's covenant, and to season the people of the earth. We are called to melt the hatred and cruelty that permeates our world and illuminate the darkest, most hopeless corners.

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The power of God supports and sustains us. The love of Jesus stands with us if we risk whatever it takes to become salt and light to the world. And when we fail in this effort, God will raise us up and renew us and give us strength to persevere, again and again.

Isaiah tells us today that:

"if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. God will always guide you and satisfy your needs in parched places... make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail."

That's what it means to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Jesus does not need to go on a spiritual salt-free diet... he needs us to live lives that reflect his teachings. He needs us to go out and fight

for the justice we thirst for, share kindness in the darkest corners and follow God wherever we go.

There is no better time for us to show the world what it means to be salty, light filled people!

What does it mean to truly become the salt of the earth? It means reaching out to those who grieve... those who are frightened... those who are in need. We stand with our communities in a world in desperate need of what faithful seasoning and love filled light can provide. Let us remain committed to living into the values that Jesus proclaimed up on a mountain and let us accept the responsibility to make ourselves and others a people reflecting the love of God.

Benediction

Beloved, Your strength may fail but God's hand never will!

One: Alleluia! Alleluia! Jesus declares that we, in him, are salt and light!

People: May we, by faith, season the world with love and dispel all darkness of injustice. Alleluia! Alleluia!