

Salt, Curses, and Blessings

A message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

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by Rev. Dave Le Grand

You are Salt and Light, says Jesus in chapter 5 of Matthew's Gospel. The metaphor of light is frequently used by writers in the Bible. A holy pillar of fire lights the dark path of Israelites escaping from captivity in Egypt.¹ God's light shines into the darkness and uncertainty of life in the opening chapter of the Gospel of John. Holy light inspires, comforts, reveals, guides.

But light is not always a blessing, sometimes it is a curse. Consider how Light can pollute darkness. I was a young minister in the Huntsville area in 1996. Then, Highway 11 was a two-lane road through towns. I would stop in Huntsville and admire the stars. Only a few years later, all I saw from the highway was the collective glow emanating from the lights of Huntsville. I imagine simple technologies decades ago, like electric lights, were not initially welcomed in worship spaces that enjoyed the glow of candlelight.

Let us shift focus onto the other metaphor Jesus uses, and it's meaning, in ancient time, and now: *You are salt of the earth*.

Salt is essential to life and health. So common in our everyday lives, that some might unconsciously drown their meal in it. Consider in ancient times. Millennia ago, Roman soldiers were sometimes paid in salt. A commander might ask if a soldier was "worth his or her salt." Our modern word salary is rooted in the Latin *sal* for salt.²

We cannot live without it; if we don't get enough salt in our diet, we get headaches, we might even die. Well, you get the point. It is easy to buy salt in the store now, but in ancient times, salt was significantly more difficult to come by.

I'm hoping you at home prepared a food that you commonly salt for flavour – like a cucumber or a tomato, or an egg. In the sanctuary this morning, congregants received 2 crackers. One cracker salted and one without. I invite you to eat the food, the cracker, without salt. I think that we can agree, it is plain. Tasty, natural.

So now, salt the food you may have at home, here where I am, eat that salted cracker. Savour it, and ponder quietly, what might Jesus be saying to us who join the masses who were listening to this sermon that Jesus preached, punctuated by the proclamation: You are the salt of the earth. "Salt of the earth." I've heard that phrase on everyday conversation. That person is salt of the earth – noble, reliable, good to the core.

We know, though, that there can be too much of a good thing. Salt is too often the go-to preservative in canned foods. Salt can be a curse too. Do not lose your saltiness. Perhaps yours and my uniqueness.

¹ Genesis reference

² <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/paperbacktheology/2014/02/epiphany-5a-matthew-313-20-salt-light-law-and-the-prophets.html> Tim Suttle Patheos February 12, 2014

Jesus says this as part of his larger sermon on the Mount. Only a few verses before today's scripture reading, Jesus delivers the Beatitudes. You know, where Jesus' connects with the congregation:

Blessed are the poor in spirit...;

Blessed are those who mourn...;

Blessed are the meek...;

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...;

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account...³

We get a sense of who showed up for that sermon, that day. Do we find ourselves among those salt of the earth, those who struggle to hold onto hope? Those who quietly endure, or perhaps not so quietly! Those among us who might feel that they just can't catch a break. We get bad luck if we get any luck at all in life.

Edgy post-modern pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber Wears her struggles and brokenness on her sleeve. A recovering addict, she confesses how, for years, she was sure that the *salt of the earth* people that Jesus preached to, calling them blessed, that they were the people that our culture typically labels "salt of the earth". Noble people. People who have got it together. Bolz-Weber had an epiphany, though. She says:

...perhaps there were people in the crowd (that Jesus preached to) who totally had their (lives) together. People who had solid relationships and never had collection agencies calling them... people who knew exactly what they were doing. (but) . . . that's not who we are told were coming to Jesus.

The ones we are told were coming to Jesus, the ones presumably to whom he was preaching, were described as the sick, those who were in pain, who fought with demons... in other words, the salt of the earth and the light of the world are just the people who happen to be standing in the need of God. (Those) who bear the spiritual cracks that let in the light, who have the salt of sweat and tears on their broken bodies, (Jesus) says YOU are salt. You. You are light.⁴

Standing in the need of God. I like that summary. That sounds like me a lot of the time, and when I think I've got things under control, perhaps I'm in danger of losing my saltiness. How about you? What is Jesus saying to you and I, today, as we talk about being as salt and light in our world? How can our living "season" the world in ways that remind people around you that God's unconditional love saves us all? Absolutely every one of us!

If you're feeling alone, or ignored, or exhausted, God's love invites you into the community of radical hospitality. You are salt of the earth. You are light – shine, don't hide it. Season... Shine... with love that invites others into love's circle. Amen.

³ Matthew chapter 5. To find the reference online, click

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+5%3A+1-11&version=NRSVUE>

⁴ <https://progressivechristianity.org/resources/salty/> Salty, a short sermon for inside a *women's prison by Nadia Bolz-Weber on September 9, 2022