

We are the salt and the light

Anybody feeling particularly salty today? How about bright and shining? You are “salt of the earth,” and “light of the world” aren’t you? That’s what Jesus says about you in today’s gospel.

Today’s gospel is a small piece of what Jesus preaches in his sermon on the mount. He’s preaching about salt and light but that’s not really what he’s talking about, is it? What is he really talking about? Us, right? He’s talking about you and me. Salt and light are the metaphors he uses to talk about us and our lives.

And he doesn’t give us much more than the metaphors. “You are the salt of the earth” and “You are the light of the world,” he says. He offers a couple of sentences of commentary on both, but that seems to be it.

He doesn’t offer details about what he means. He doesn’t give an interpretation or explanation. He doesn’t tell us how they apply to our lives. All that is for us to figure out. That’s our work to do.

It’s as if Jesus is saying, “Here, take these two metaphors and go play with them. Ponder them. Mull them over. Consider what they might be showing and asking you about your life. Ponder over them. See what they bring up for you.”

And that’s what I want us to do with them. I want us “to do the work that Jesus has given us to do.”

Jesus is inviting us to taste and see our lives, their quality, character, and impact, what’s working and what’s not. So, I won’t offer any interpretations or explanations of today’s gospel and I won’t tell you what it means or how it applies to your lives. I don’t know. I have no answers, but I have some questions, and I think it’s enough for us to follow the questions.

Oh, and it is alright for us to have some questions. If we don’t understand what we are reading or what we are being taught, we need to take the time to ask the questions and hopefully get some answers to give us better understanding of what it is that Jesus is trying to teach us.

What do you think that Jesus is getting at when he says, “You are the salt of the earth”? What does that mean for you today?

We've all tasted food and said, "Please pass the salt." And we've tasted food and said, "Ah, I need some water." Salt seasons and flavors food. But it must be the right amount. If there's not enough salt the food is tasteless and bland. And if there is too much you can barely swallow it.

What parts of your life are well seasoned and flavorful? What parts are bland, tasteless, and in need of salt? What's the salt you need? Are there parts of your life today that you can't swallow? If so, what's going on? And what are you doing about it? And are there people around you that you can reach out to, to get help?

Think about salt in your relationships. In what ways are you flavoring and enhancing the lives of others? What difference are you making in the world? What relationships need some salt? What kind and how much? Don't forget, salt can also dry out things. In what ways have you and I become salty and difficult to be with? Have we left another dry and thirsty? What parts of your life are dry and parched? What's needed?

Salt is a preservative. What are you preserving these days? Is it worth preserving and keeping? What in your life today needs salting and preserving? And what needs to be let go of? Remember, however, salt can also be corrosive. What has become corrosive in your life? In what ways have we become corrosive to ourselves or another?

Roman soldiers were often paid with salt. It held value. Maybe Jesus is saying that you and I are of value. Do we recognize that about ourselves and one another? Are we living in ways that are worth our salt? What does that look like in each of our lives today? Are we being true to ourselves, authentic? Or are we betraying ourselves? Yes, we are of value but sometimes we need to take ourselves with a grain of salt.

The right mixture of salt and water can clean wounds, prevent infection, and promote healing. What needs healing in your life today and what might that look like? In what ways are we tending to and healing the wounds of others? Remember, however, no one likes having salt rubbed in his or her wound. Compassion is key. What would it be like to hold the pain of another and taste the salt in our tears?

Not only are "you the salt of the earth," "you are the light of the world."

What does it mean and look like for you to be “the light of the world”? If we’re going to consider the light, we also have to consider the darkness. Both are realities in our lives. Where and what is the light in your life today? And where and what is the darkness in your life today?

Think about how light makes a difference. After a few cold and gray days, we long for light and warmth. Plants turn toward the light. Recall a time when you watched the sun’s light rise over the horizon and felt something new rise within you. We turn on a night light to push back our fear of the dark. We speak of new insights and awarenesses as the light having come on. And who among us hasn’t spent a long dark night waiting and praying for the morning light? What difference is light making in your life today and what difference is your light making in the life of another?

I leave quite early to go to work in Kingston. The earlier I get there, the earlier I can come home. With the time change that happened on November 2nd of last year, it was much darker earlier in the afternoon. I made the decision to travel a bit in the darkness in my morning start, because I knew the light was coming. But coming home at night, when the darkness started, it just got darker.

On those morning commutes, I talk to God and tell him how much that I am looking forward to his morning light. I tell him how much the light that he shines into my life is appreciated. I like talking about God’s light, Jesus’ light, and even my own light. Only because I appreciate every moment that it is a part of my life and daily routine.

In what ways are you shining the light of love, peace, mercy, forgiveness, hope, healing, compassion? What if anything, keeps your light from shining? What would it take to remove the obstructions from your light? On whom are you shining your light? And from whom do you withhold your light?

When have you sought the light of truth? And when have you hidden from it? What parts of yourself are living in the light? And what parts are hiding in the shadows? Who has been a light in your life? And for whom are you a light today?

What parts of your life need enlightenment? And in what ways are you illuminating the life and world around you?

Just as with salt, sometimes there can be too much or too little light. Too little light and we can't see. Too much light and we are blinded. Either way we're left in the dark. We need to consider the darkness in our lives, relationships, and private thoughts. What are we being asked for?

In John's account of the gospel Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Today he says, "You are the light of the world." Maybe we're more like Jesus than we often know or believe. Maybe light is how Jesus shares his life with us. Maybe there is only one light but many lamps.

Taste and see. What does your life taste like today? What does your life look like?

In whatever ways you might have answered these questions, in whatever ways you might have applied these metaphors to your life, and whatever you taste and see, it's just information. It is not a conclusion or final judgment. It's information for you to consider. It's a starting point. It's an invitation.

I find that being the light is much easier than being the salt. I understand the importance of salt, but a warm smile, a compliment, a helping hand are much easier for me than sorting out what is "scarring" in my life. It probably needs to be done, but it will be very hard and probably sad in many ways

To taste and see opens the door to a new life, new possibilities, and new ways of being. I wonder what that means for us today. I wonder what is being offered to us this day. Amen