

Dear Future Me...You Are!

A sermon based on Matthew 5:13-16 - ***You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.***

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

“What do you want to be?” You likely heard that question a number of times growing up. And you probably never even batted an eye at it because, as a kid, there’s no pressure...the whole world is your oyster, and you can let your imagination run wild. At one time, I wanted to be a pastor/astronaut. And Mara, it seems, changes her mind every day, from wanting to be a fire fighter to a vet to a ballerina to a mommy to a bus driver to a teacher to a dragon rider. And that’s great and ok because she’s got time to grow up and figure it out.

But there comes this point, doesn’t there, where you eventually grow up. You wake up, and high school is done – or college is done – and it can’t be anymore “what do I want to be?” No, now it’s “What am I? Who am I?”

That question – that thought – can be daunting and scary, and it sometimes leads to indecision and inaction and living on your parents’ couch longer than you probably should. Or, later on, it can lead to discontent and feeling stuck and midlife crises...because, there’s so much importance and value attached to that question...again, what are you...who are you?

You know, I would say we have to attach the same importance and value to that question in regards to our faith lives as well. So, as a believer in Jesus, as a child of God, what are you? Who are you?

Well, thankfully, today, Jesus makes it easy for us. He simply tells you who/what you are. “You are salt...you are light.”

Do you understand what he means? When Jesus calls you salt? Salt back then was used for flavoring and preserving. So Jesus calls us to preserve his Word, to keep obeying it and proclaiming it so it doesn’t rot and just go away (right, if we don’t use it or share it, what do you think will happen?). And, we’re also salt in the sense we flavor how others view Jesus (right, since he’s not here, physically, how will others know what kind of God he is, if not through us...so what kind of impression of Jesus do we leave on other people? Is it favorable? Is it favorable?).

What about when Jesus calls you “the light of the world”? Do you understand? We talked about that a few weeks ago, how like the moon, we reflect the light of the Son...both as we show the love of Jesus in how live every day and as we share the love of Jesus...all of that God showing through us.

That's who you are...you are salt. You are light.

Are you?

You see, there's this subtle nuance in the language Jesus uses in our verses here. Did you notice it? Jesus, he doesn't say he *wants* us to *be* salt and light. He doesn't want you, as a believer, to aspire to be salt and light in this world. No, he's telling you, believer, this is what you are.

Christians blessed by Christ are called to be blessings to the world around us. You are salt, Christ says, so be it: act as that preservative keeping God's Word from rotting and being lost. You are light, so be it: shine into the darkness of the world so people see you and see Jesus in you and know how different you are.

Do you understand? Do you understand the implications?

We don't just get to turn it off. You don't just get to decide when and where you'd like to be salt. Salt doesn't lose saltiness. You don't just get say, "Ok, now I'll shine brightly for Jesus; but now I'll dim that light down or hide it under a bushel so others can't see it."

As children of God, as believers, we have a God-given purpose in this world...to be salt and light. And so, logically, if someone isn't doing this, they are not fulfilling God's purpose, and, in truth, they're most likely not a Christian at all. Right, we can't cease to be salt and light and remain Christians.

So, again, are you? You know, we've been throwing around those two words – salt and light – and we've kind of explained what they mean. But can we be a bit more practical? What does salt and light look like today?

It looks like this. Look at the outside walls. Have you noticed these banners before? Do you know why they're hanging there? 2 reasons...1) What do they all have in common? "Be the Church." Be who you are, part of the (C)hurch, the body of all believers of all time...which is right in line with Jesus' words here.

But then, also, 2) What does it mean to be the Church? Connect, Grow, Reach, Serve...which are very close to the four pillars of our mission here at Light of the World...to Gather/Connect with other believers here around the Word of God, to Grow in our relationship with God (again, through his Word) and with other believers here, to Go/Reach out into our community with the good news of Jesus, and Glow/Serve, to put Christ's love into action out there.

That's what it means to be a light here at Light of the World. That's what it means to be the light (and salt) Jesus has made you to be...to gather, grow, go, glow. Are you?

If that's not enough for you to see it, if you're thinking, "But, Pastor, those are just hangings. That's just a mission statement we (or actually, more like you) came up with," and you're just dismissing the importance of displaying these traits in your life...then how about promises? How much value do you put into promises...into promises you made?

In the presence of God and witnesses here, when asked, "**Do you intend faithfully to conform all your life to the teachings of God's Word, to be faithful (meaning regular) in the use of the Word and sacrament, and in faith and action remain true to God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—as long as you live?**" you promised, "I do, and I ask God to help me."

In the presence of God and witnesses here, when asked, **“Will you support with your prayers, time, talents, and offerings the work our Lord has given to this congregation?”** you promised, “I do, and I ask God to help me.”

Like the Israelites in our First Lesson, who, after Joshua reminded them of all the great things God had done for them, promised to **“serve the Lord our God and obey him (always),”** you, having been taught God’s Word, especially the amazing message of Christ’s love, you eagerly promised to be salt and light...always. So, what happened?

Over 8 years of all I’ve shared with you from God’s Word (countless sermons talking about and encouraging witnessing about Jesus and living in a way that shows Jesus so you can share Jesus), and what did you do with that?

Take a look around. I know our faithfulness can never be entwined with numbers and the growth of a congregation. But numbers can and do often tell a huge chunk of the story...starting with our effort...your effort...my effort...in being salt and light...for Jesus. And I’m not off the hook, either. I want you to know that.

But, can you honestly look at these banners or our mission statement, hear again your confirmation promises to God, think about the fairly flat growth as a congregation we’ve had here, and conclude, “I’m always salt. I’m always light.”

I can’t.

And, this is not the time for, “Well, I really want to be.” I think the ageless Yoda put it best, “Do or do not, there is no try.” As a believer, I shouldn’t have to try to be salt. I shouldn’t have to try to be light. As a believer, I should just be.

And I’m not...not always.

But here’s what I have been. Lazy. Complacent. Scared. Full of excuses. Salty (and not in the biblical sense). Under the bushel...maybe even the bushel. Sinful. Any of those you, too?

All of those – any of those, that’s not who a child of God should be.

Can you think back to a time when you were on fire for Jesus...before now, when you’ve maybe set your faith on cruise control and are mostly just going through the motions? Can you remember that time?

How do we get that back? How can we get re-kindled? How can we get our salty flavor back?

You heard the solution earlier. Did you catch it? In our Second Lesson, **“You are...God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” (1 Peter 2:9).**

“His wonderful light.” You know what that is, don’t you? Jesus said of himself, **“I am the light of the world” (John 8:12).** You see, it’s our great privilege, as believers, to reflect the glorious, saving light of Jesus. God has actually placed us on a pedestal, not only to honor and bless us but to have us display his glory to all people.

But, that could never happen without Jesus first coming as light, and displaying God’s glory for us. And he did. He perfectly shined the light of the gospel to those living in darkness. Jesus is the spotlight

showing us the way to heaven, which is only through him. And so he shined with the light of his perfect love by his death on the cross to pay for the darkness of our sins! And then he rose! His light shined bright on Easter morning as he rose from the grave! And like a search light he came looking for us. He rescued us. And now, he still preserves our life...still, even when we fail to be salt and light! He forgives.

So, again, how can we be salt and light again? Plug in to Christ. Plug into his Word. Because light of the gospel of Jesus and his forgiveness – that gospel alone - is what re-ignites us and re-kindles our desire to be who we are – salt and light in the world.

Well, guess what? You're plugged in. You're here. You've heard God's Word. You've heard the good news of Jesus – his life, death, and resurrection – for you. You're standing in the light of Jesus' love.

So, what's left? Be who you are. Be salt. Be light. Not, "I'll work on it," or, "I really do want to be." It'd be foolish to think "here's what I want to be for Jesus" but then continue with status quo. That can't happen.

You are salt. You are light. As God's children, it's our very nature to speak of and live for our Savior. The apostles once declared, ***"We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).*** Now, neither can we.

So, away with the "buts" and the excuses. We are salt. We are light. And, plugged in, we can – and we will be salt and light.

It's going to take some work, especially if you feel you're set in your ways or you think you have "old dog" syndrome.

Something interesting I heard the day after the Kansas City Chiefs won the Super Bowl this past Sunday was what MVP QB Patrick Mahomes had written on his Twitter account 7 years ago. He said, ***"I bet it feels amazing to be the quarterback who says "I'm going to Disney World" after winning the Super Bowl."*** Seven years later, that came true for him.

The point? To get where you want to be (and where Jesus wants you to be)...it takes work.

So, what does it take to be salt and light for Jesus? That'll be the major part of your "Dear Future Me..." writing prompt for this week: what, specifically, is it going to take for you to be salt and light for Jesus...again and always?

Here's what it takes.

1) Be out there.

I went to the gym this week to work out (we had a free week pass). I didn't have to; I'm more than content to work out at home. I've talked to Mara's dance teacher about helping out – either with their rehearsals or their recital - in some way. I don't have; I doubt many dads are jumping at the chance to get involved in dance. I'm actively looking for at least another way to get involved in the community...to rub shoulders with people who aren't connected to our church and might not know Jesus.

I'm not telling you this to toot my own horn. My point is...you're not going to shine that light very bright if it's trapped in the bushel of your own home, if you mostly live as a recluse (which I know is hard not

to, especially during these months). I struggle to get out of the comfort of my office and meet people...but I'm going to, so I can be salt and light.

2) Be available.

It was a little odd. Last Sunday, I asked a number of you if you were interested in ushering, and, like, I barely finished asking, and the immediate response from many – either through body language or verbal response – was, “No, not really.”

It got me thinking, is that what I do, is that what we do when opportunities to be salt and light appear. Someone wants to talk after a rough day at work, and I'm like, “I'd love to, but I gotta run.” Or someone looks like they need assistance, and I'm veering off the other way.

Generally speaking, we don't seem to have a lot of time for people and their problems anymore. For Jesus, maybe we should. So, maybe next time, before the quick response, wait 5/10 seconds, slow down, say to yourself, “I am light. I am salt,” and be there for them.

3) Be intentional. I don't know about you, but even for me, it doesn't come naturally to just start talking with someone about Jesus. I have to intentionally look for opportunities in conversations to bring up the topic of my faith or my church. But, again, I'm going to do that for Jesus.

I watched a presentation a fellow pastor made a couple of weeks ago – looking at revitalizing ministry one person at a time, and he made the line sound so simple, “Do you have a pastor who visits you when you need him, because mine will.” That could be your lead-in. Could you try it?

4) Be ready.

At the Seminary, I had a professor who said you could call him up at any hour of the night and he'd be able to recite the 4 characteristics of Lutheran liturgy. A couple students took him up on that challenge, and, while he had a few choice words for them, he did recite it.

The point is God can drop a situation for you to be salt and light into your lap at any time. Be ready.

How will you be ready? Have a few passages from God's Word tucked in your back pocket, which, then, adds importance (God would say necessity) to your being in worship and Bible class regularly, so you can be equipped.

5) Be loving. I don't know that much more needs to be said. You care about them as more than a person. You care about their soul; being salt and light shows it.

6) Be confident. God promises, **“I am with you always” (Matthew 28:20)**. God promises, **“[My Word] will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire” (Isaiah 55:11)**. Hold on to those promises. Go about, placing your confidence in them.

7) Finally, be reminded. By God's Word. Again and again. Here in worship, in Bible class, in personal devotion...you have opportunities for confession and God's absolution. Through God's Word, you get to be recharged, to have your salty flavor boosted.

And all that's left? Be salt. Be light. Be genuine. I don't do this only because I want another butt in the pew to make our numbers look better. Jesus wants people in heaven. So do it. And it's going to take us

being salt and light for that to happen...showing Jesus, flavoring people's impressions and understanding of Jesus, preserving them for eternity in heaven.

Who am I? What am I?

A father, a husband, a brother, a friend, a mentor, your pastor. Even more than that? I am salt. I am light. For Jesus. To the world.

And you are, too. Are you ready to be who you are? Then I want you to stand. Let's renew our promises to God.

“Do you intend faithfully to conform all your life to the teachings of God’s Word, to be faithful (meaning regular) in the use of the Word and sacrament, and in faith and action remain true to God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—as long as you live?”

“Will you support with your prayers, time, talents, and offerings the work our Lord has given to this congregation?”

Will you be salt and light? You are...so be. You are the light of the world, so be light for the earth. You are the salt of the earth, so be salt for it. You are. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

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