



Would anyone here,
admit to being a little salty?
Usually, as a woman,
we have to wait to reach a certain age,
where traits like assertiveness or being in charge,
or confident and unapologetic,
you have to wait to be a certain age
for those traits to get reassessed as
'salty.'
And sometimes we associate being salty
with being angry or irritable.
I picture it more as someone who is
a little grouchy or crotchety,
or a tad sour, maybe even sassy.
None of that sounds terribly appealing does it?

Well today is all about giving you permission
to be salty.
In fact, Jesus encourages us to be salty
because it is the root of who we are.
I know, because scripture says so
and gives me some clues.
Bible stories are like that;
dropping hints that are sometimes
big and loud and unique
and other times they are small and ordinary.
It amazes me that having read a story
in scripture many times before,
I will still find something new.

On January 26th, just a few weeks ago,
I preached a sermon
using the lectionary Matthew text

assigned to that day, Matt. 4:12-23.

The passage was about Jesus calling his disciples;
the sermon was about how
students usually picked a rabbi to follow;
it isn't a rabbi picking students;
and how only the best of the best
were usually chosen
but here is Jesus picking fisherman;
about how following a rabbi
meant the rabbi thought
you could do what he did.

Do you remember that one?

Well, that fourth chapter of Matthew,
leads us directly to our passage today.

Last week, in the lectionary,
had I chosen the gospel lesson instead of Micah,
we would have read Jesus' sermon on the Beatitudes.

Our passage today is a continuation of that sermon,
which is part of Matthew's famous,
sermon on the mount.

The thing is—in terms of timing,
the sermon on the mount
that begins with the beatitudes
—actually, begins in chapter 4,
with verses we read weeks ago.

Again, we read Matt. 4:12-23;

I want to start with chapter 4 and read 4:22-25, 5:1-2
and then continue with our assigned text today,
so, listen now for a word from the Lord.

"²²Immediately they (James and John) left the boat and their father,
and followed him.

"²³Jesus went throughout Galilee,
teaching in their synagogues
and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom
and curing every disease
and every sickness among the people.

²⁴So his fame spread throughout all Syria,
and they brought to him all the sick,
those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains,
demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them.

²⁵And great crowds followed him from Galilee,
the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea,
and from beyond the Jordan.

When Jesus saw the crowds,
he went up the mountain;
and after he sat down,
his disciples came to him.

²Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

¹³"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.

¹⁴"You are the light of the world.
A city built on a hill cannot be hid.

¹⁵No one after lighting a lamp
puts it under the bushel basket,
but on the lampstand,
and it gives light to all in the house.

¹⁶In 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.

¹⁷"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets;
I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.

¹⁸For 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.

¹⁹Therefore, 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.

²⁰For I tell you,
unless your righteousness exceeds
that of the scribes and Pharisees,
you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.



Now, did you catch the timing of all that?
The disciples decide to follow Jesus
and his popularity is such
that crowds are coming to him.
Seeing the crowds,
he goes up on a mount to teach them.
Now, here's the clue I've always overlooked.
Who is in the crowd listening to Jesus teach?

I've always assumed,
the crowd was full normal crowd people.
A crowd like a concert
or a football game.
So perhaps shopkeepers and tanners,
olive venders and fig tree salesmen.
Mothers with babies
and women who sold fabrics.
I have pictured normal people,
perhaps this shows my prejudice
but mostly able-bodied, well people like me,
those who find what this rabbi is saying
to be compelling.

In my mind the crowd is so normal (*full of Jewish people most who felt oppressed*)

that I haven't really ever considered
thinking about who was actually listening to Jesus.
Or even considered that the story itself
tells me who is there listening.
The story itself tells me who is in the crowd.
Listen again, from Matthew 4
who are in the crowds of people
listening to Jesus' sermon on the
mount:

²⁴So his fame spread throughout all Syria,
and they brought to him all the sick,
those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains,
demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them.
²⁵And great crowds followed him from Galilee,
the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea,
and from beyond the Jordan.

All the sick, those who are afflicted
with various diseases and pains,
demoniacs, epileptics and paralytics.
That's who is in the crowd.¹

Farm and vineyard workers,
the tanners, fabric sellers, fig
plantation managers—guess what?
Guess where they are?

They are at work.
This crowd listening to Jesus
is full of all the “wrong people.”

It is the forgotten, the downtrodden
the poor and lonely, the JV team of disciples,
the caregivers for these sick people,
that's the crowd.
And they are the ones who hear,
you are the salt of the earth.
You are the light of the world.

¹ <https://www.saltproject.org/progressive-christian-blog/2020/1/28/blessing-first-salts-lectionary-commentary-for-epiphany-4>

Jesus has already told the crowds
they are blessed in his beatitudes.
And back then, just like now,
people were kind of obsessed
with being blessed, especially by God.
They wanted to know
what they had to do
in order receive divine favor.

Jesus turns the notion of blessing on its head
by telling this crowd not how to be blessed
but that they are already blessed.

Affirming that they are blessed,
even though they are sick and afflicted,
poor and downtrodden,
was shocking enough.

Now talks about life instruction.

And what's great about that is,
he isn't giving instructions about living
so that these people will be blessed;

he's saying you're already a blessing,
here's how you were made to be a blessing for others.

Here's how you fulfill the role of blessedness:

*You are the salt of the earth,
don't lost your saltiness
you are the light of the world.
Go shine before others.*

Who would have thought,
that these folks were the ones
who are a blessing to the world?

Who would have thought,
that whatever you label yourself with
could be the way you show
God's love and mercy to others?



And salt?

I mean I love salty snacks
more than sweet ones.

Anyone else team salt?

But being the salt of the earth?

Salt is so,
well ordinary.

I prefer to think of myself
more as the Cajun spice, Lord,
not plain ole salt.

Salt is one of the only spices
that often enhances other spices.

A little salt goes a long way.

Salt has always been in a sense, valuable.

It had many uses in the ancient world.

Of course, we know it is used for flavor food.

It was also a preservative for meat and a purifier
—to get the blood out for sacrifices.

And I can attest that my skin
felt amazing after floating in the Dead Sea.



But what I didn't know was that for Israel,
salt was also a sign of God's covenant.

Numbers instructs, "All the offerings
that the Israelites present to the Lord
I have given to you,
together with your sons and daughters,
as a perpetual due;
it is a covenant of salt
forever before the Lord
for you and your descendants as well." (18:19)

And in 2 Chronicles (13:5),
“Do you not know
that the Lord God of Israel
gave the kingship over Israel to David and his sons
by a covenant of salt?”

And in Leviticus,
“You shall not omit from your grain offering
the salt of the covenant
with your God;
with all your offerings
you shall offer salt.”



The people in the crowd
would have known the clues about salt
when Jesus spoke.
“In short, when Jesus said,
“You are the salt of the earth,”
he and [t]his audience
likely had much more in mind
than a convenient flavor source.
Salt was, to put it succinctly,
a necessary element of life.
And, by extension, salt was a symbolic bond
of the necessary relationship
between God and Israel.”²

You are already blessed,
here is how to be a blessing to the world....
be salt...
but if salt loses its taste, Jesus says
...wait Jesus,
can this actually happen?

² Amy Lindeman Allen, <https://politicaltheology.com/the-politics-of-saltiness-matthew-513-20-amy-allen/>

"In Greek Jesus wonders
about salt becoming *moronos*,
from which we [get] our English word
"moron," or "fool."

[So, it is like he is saying] if salt becomes foolish,
Jesus asks, then what good is it?"³

Scott Hoezee, who teaches at Calvin Theological Seminary
likened it to,
let's say you are cooking on the stove.
You use the best ingredients.

Farm raised, non-GMO chickens
to make your stock.

You chop up organic onions, carrots and celery.

Handmade pasta noodles cooked al dente.

You got everything ready
and get out the salt
and put it next to the stove.

In goes the stock, the veggies
—you put in a bay leaf or two.

It boils and simmers,
the smell fills the house.

You put it in bowls, and everyone digs in.

But it is flat and bland.

'Why doesn't this taste good,'
your children and guests ask?

Didn't you use any salt?

Well of course not,

I have the salt here next to the stove
but I didn't put any in.

How foolish would that be?

You have to put the salt
into your cooking
for it to do its job
and flavor the food.

You have mix salt into cookie batter

³ Scott Hoezee, Epiphany 5 A, <https://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/epiphany-5a-2/?type=the%20lectionary%20gospel>

or else those cookies
will end being something
even your dogs won't eat.

So, what if salt becomes foolish?

You are the salt of the earth,
but if you aren't willing
to be of use in the world;
if you aren't ready to mix in
with the life around you,
well what good is that?

What kind of person has a saltshaker
but doesn't add it to
your French fries or the chips at El Paso?

"Salt has a definite purpose
and if you won't use it for that purpose,
then the salt becomes foolish
to have around."⁴

You are salt, you are light.

Don't be foolish.

You've got a role to play
and responsibilities to fulfill
and I'm here to remind you
to be who you are,
a blessing.

And Jesus is saying this
to the most marginalized people;
the sick, the outcast, the poor, the forgotten.

The beauty is that now,
you and I are in the crowd too.

And Jesus's instructions
are just as much for us as anyone.

Go and do and be
what I have told you that you are:
salt and light.

Be it, fulfill it.
That's what I came to show you,
fulfill your task of being salt and light;

⁴ ibid

this will change everything.

Eugene Peterson was asked
what would he say if he knew
he was writing his last sermon
before he died.

His answer was surprisingly simple and ordinary.

His reply was,

"I think I would want to talk about things
that are immediate and ordinary.

In the kind of world we live in,
the primary way that I can get people
to be aware of God is to say,
'Who are you going to have breakfast with tomorrow,
and how are you going to treat that person?

In my last sermon, I guess I'd want to say,
'Go home and be good to your spouse.

Treat your children with respect.

Do a good job at work."⁵



Go, do and be.

You are the salt of the earth.

You are the light of the world.

Jesus believes in us.

He thinks we can do the kinds of things he does.

Whit, in his Enote this week

asked for ways that people
are being salt and light.

Here's what was sent in:

"My grandma came to church when she was a little girl to sing in the choir even when her home life was screwed up. When she was in hospice, the chaplain would make his rounds with her to no avail, but one of the CNAs

⁵ ibid

would come in and sing hymns while she was working. My grandmother sang on her deathbed because of her. I don't think anyone told her how meaningful that was to her, but she was salt and light." (Zack King)

I'm walking alongside two men whose marriages are falling apart. And I'm walking alongside a man and whose wife has just recently been diagnosed with an aggressive form of breast cancer. (from Melvin)

Recently I was called "the voice of reason" after speaking with someone in a difficult business situation. I was able to calm her down and give her some ways to view the situation. (In this instance I had 'a dog in the fight'). She was grateful.

Then a friend confided a sudden family problem to me just this week. Here again I was able to help her diffuse her anger and place her energy looking forward instead of back, (which never does any good.) She greatly appreciated my input and the situation is working toward a wonderful conclusion. In this instance I had 'no dog in the fight' which may have helped.

Don't know where my help came from but perhaps God put calming words into my heart and mind. I was grateful in both instance that I was able to help. I have led such a good life with so few bumps that I need to help others to feel fulfilled and deserving of what has been given to me. (Carol Robinson)

For sure Sarah White, Mimi, and Jenny Anderson for helping me with Mary Beth to and from preschool since December as I'm recovering from this herniated disc postpartum. Hasn't exactly been the fourth trimester I pictured - but I guess that is also why it is called a fourth trimester. (Laura Turrentine)

As new members, so many church members have been "light and salt" to us as they have made us feel so welcome and a part the First Pres family! We are so grateful. (from Barbara Hudson)

I know someone who hand makes thoughtful presents for students who are going to college, just to brighten their days.

I know someone who sends me pictures of my kids when they're able to attend events and I can't be there.

I know someone who looks me straight in the eye and asks, "How are you" and really wants to hear the answer. (All from Kim Holden)

Everyone who serves the Lord as His body on earth is the salt. Some people are extraordinary, like those serving on mission trips or Missionaries. Others serve behind the scenes for our church, Karl Thomason is a good example—usher captain, Wednesday night clean-up, filling in for Kim, he probably does more things that I don't know about. (Terry Appenzeller)

I know of a loving daughter who helps her mother who is dealing with eyesight issues. She checks in on her, takes her out to doctor appointments, gets her to church, and also makes sure her grandsons spend quality time with her whenever they are home from school.

I know of someone who started helping her daughter's private school swim team when it was just 3 kids. The mother agreed to be their "sponsor" at the formation of the team. Now this person is finishing coaching season 5. You may have noticed in the HDR that her girls *and* boys' teams at UCHS just won the Foothills Athletic Conference Championship. (from Michael Webber)

Bob Smith takes George Brown to lunch every Tuesday! (from Tod Caldwell)

"I know someone who prepares a meal for someone in our church family at least once a week, every week for the past several years. She is salt. She is light." (from Matt Schrum)

So, this is permission to be salty.

Not the grouch.

Not sour.

But be what you already are.

Be salt and light.

Be ready and willing to be yourself
in a world that needs whoever you are;

ready to show others
God's love and mercy.