

SERMON P130 FOR JANUARY 22, 2017

It was early days for the disciples. There they sat with Jesus who was teaching the fishers and tax collectors whom he had called to follow him. They had left their old life and were being shaped by love and justice to embrace a new life, a new identity, a new sense of meaning, a new understanding of their power.

So what did they hear? They heard that they were salt and light, the salt of the earth, to be specific, and the light of the world.

How would you feel if you were told that you were the salt of the earth? Would you believe it if someone trusted and wise called you the light of the world? Not a reading light or an oil lamp on a Palestinian table. But the light of the world? Who would believe it? Not those beginning disciples who were unsure and inexperienced. And not us. Surely, not us.

Well, Meg and Parkminster, the message is for us. It is for us who are gathered here today, just as we are. Think about what Jesus is getting at. The grammar is clear in English and in Greek. Right now, we are salt and light. It is not that if we got the proper training, we could be salt and light. It is not that, with some extra help we might become salt and light. It is not that if we practice, our lives maybe could shine. We are, we are told, all we need to be to change the world.

There are two profoundly simple things to grasp by means of the salt and light metaphors. When it comes to being light, don't hide. Put your lamp on a lampstand for all to see. Makes sense, right? It even sounds simple to do. Don't hide the light of the world from the world. Where what sounds simple becomes a challenge is in owning the identity of "light of the world." Being that light means that we have power, the power to name and to change, the power to heal and to make whole. Often we would rather not have capacity and agency because then we have responsibility. Sometimes it is easier to hide the light and avoid its power for good. But Jesus says the light has to be visible for all to see. Forget hiding, people, and shine.

Now, when it comes to being salt of the earth, Jesus encourages his disciples not to lose their flavour, their zest, their capacity to make life taste good. On the surface, this seems self-evident. When I thought about salt losing its flavour, complexity set in.

When does salt become unsalty? Have you ever had to toss a box of salt because it had become bland? Salt lasts forever. It is not like herbs and spices that diminish in intensity over time. It is not like chicken or fish that can go bad. It is not like canned food that can deteriorate after the best before date. Salt is always salty.

That is, unless it is no longer salt. If the molecules that create salt, the most common being sodium and chlorine, get separated from one another, then salt

loses its saltiness. When salt is no longer itself, it is not zesty, potent, able to be a key spice of life.

Jesus reminds us that we are already the salt of the earth. That work is done. What he encourages us to do is not to lose ourselves, not to let go of the gift of our own personality, our identity as holy, our essence as lovers of the least. When we forget who we are as salt of the earth, we lose our saltiness, our ability to make life better. Just be who you are, says Jesus to the 12. Be yourself. You already have what it takes.

We are salt and light. The purpose of our lives is to share those gifts. We call the sharing “stewardship.” The heart of discipleship is the sharing the light and being the salt. Each of us makes the choice about the extent of our sharing.. Deciding on how to share and how much to share are stewardship decisions. If we are disciples, we cannot avoid those choices.

You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. The world needs our salt and light. Be zesty! Go shine,