

Rev. Lisa Schrott  
July 10, 2022  
Matthew 5:13-16  
The Sacred in the Ordinary: Salt and Light

### **Prayer of Illumination**

God our light, make us attentive to your Word, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, that seeing your truth we may live faithful lives serving you with all our hearts and our minds. Amen.

The theme for our summer services is the “The Sacred in the Ordinary.” Jesus’ taught his disciples using stories and parables about common elements and situations in their lives. In these stories, the ordinary was transformed into the sacred, and we get glimpses of how we can bring God’s kingdom to earth. Not only we will look for ways our lives can be transformed, we are also considering how these passages can help us better understand the elements in our worship service. This morning we explore salt and light and how they help us understand the benediction – literally the “good word” in Latin – which reminds us that our worship and service do not end at the conclusion of our Sunday worship service. Instead our worship service prepares us to go forth to love and serve the Lord in daily living. Hear then these words of Jesus from Matthew chapter 5 as a benediction – the good word – to us this morning.

Jesus said, “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.

“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. People do not light a lamp and put it under the bushel basket; rather, they put it on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In 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. **This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.**

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As a fan of the show *Chopped* on Food TV, I know the kiss of death is when judge says the meal is undersalted. It is often said with a tone of regret – you could have had the best dish if you had just added enough salt, but now – your dish is on the chopping block. I have never heard a judge say that a dish is under-peppered or under-basiled. It is always salt. After many years on the chopping block because of its contributory role in elevating sodium levels and thus high blood pressure, salt has made a comeback. About five years ago Samin Nosrat’s cookbook *Salt, Fat, Acid, Heat* upended the cooking world. Rather than focusing on techniques or even specific ingredients, her book and videos spoke philosophically about the ways to enhance flavor when cooking, using various types of salt, fat, acid and heat. Nosrat shares that not only does salt enhance flavor, “but that it has a greater impact on flavor than any other ingredient. Though salt also affects texture and helps modify other flavors, nearly every decision you’ll make about salt will involve amplifying and deepening flavor. Add it in the right amount, at the right time, in the right form, and your food will be delicious.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.saltfatacidheat.com/salt>

So what are we to make of Jesus statement to his disciples, “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.”?

Our scripture passage this morning is part of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus first major discourse or “sermon” in the Gospel of Matthew to the disciples and the crowds that followed him. At the beginning of chapter 5 we hear, “When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he began to speak and taught them, saying: ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.’ ” Jesus goes on to share the remaining “blessed are” statements that we know as the Beatitudes. The last beatitude has some of the most challenging language of the Beatitudes: “Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” Tough words and not something we often aspire to – or at least I don’t aspire to be reviled and persecuted. Yet Jesus tells us to rejoice and be glad, for we will be rewarded. He then continues with a call to discipleship, telling us all (and this is a y’all instance) that we are to be like the ordinary elements of salt and light. Ordinary elements that become sacred through the work of the Holy Spirit. Ordinary elements that we are to emulate as Christ’s disciples. Our – my - initial response to this call tends to be “sure, no problem. I’ll let my light shine – I’ll help others. I’m a real “salt of the earth” gal – no pretense here. I’ll love and care for everyone.” And then I stop to think about. Maybe this isn’t so easy.

Our words of preparation in the bulletin this morning come from the Rev. Jill Duffield, former editor of the *Presbyterian Outlook*. I really appreciate the way she frames this passage: “We are to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Seems a rather expansive mission, doesn’t it? Why couldn’t it be: you are the salt of your congregation. You are the light of your community. That’s still a tall order, but perhaps doable. Given the scope of tastelessness and the depth of darkness that pervade the globe at the moment, I think Jesus was rather ambitious in his expectation of fishermen, tax collectors and various other stragglers and sinners. The watts are running low on my Jesus light as I witness so many being trampled upon. Could the Almighty settle for a votive candle or a pinch of seasoning, enough goodness to just get me and mine through the day, rather than a preservative and beacon for all of creation?... I am struggling with Jesus’ sense of scale as he pontificates on the mount. This little light of mine, I am having a hard time letting it shine. The temptation to hide under a bushel or in the basement or with our close, comfortable circles is intense when the world seems very, very dark. That’s what we do when we get scared. We hunker down, do what we know, hide. When we see the vulnerable being trampled, our tendency is not to run out into the street and stand between them and the onslaught, rather it is to go into our homes and lock the door.” The Rev. Duffield ends saying, “This little light of mine, I am going to snuff it out so no one knows I am home. I am going to pull down the blackout curtains so that I am not an easy target for the bombs falling from the sky.”<sup>2</sup>

Yet Jesus tells us that we are to be the salt of the earth and that we are to be the light of the world. Actually in the Greek, these are more like directives, for the verbs are in the imperative tense – we are commanded to be salt of the earth and light to the world. And moreover, we

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<sup>2</sup> Jill Duffield. Looking into the Lectionary. 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany - February 5, 2017. *Presbyterian Outlook*. Her commentary can be found online at <https://pres-outlook.org/2017/02/5th-sunday-epiphany-february-5-2017/>

are commanded to embody these elements in such a way that the earth and the world know that we are acting as Christ's agents on earth. At its core, this means that we need to know Christ. We need to understand and be willing to take the bold and courageous actions that Jesus did in his ministry. Actions that got Jesus in "good trouble" to quote John Lewis. And actions that might get us into a bit of good trouble as well. To do this, we must continually nurture and replenish our saltiness and recharge our batteries that keep our lights burning brightly. We do this through worship and prayer, study and service, fellowship and community-building. In addition, we need to remain aware of what is happening in our world. We must be willing to be the salt to the people and places that are neglected, overlooked because they aren't appetizing to us. In order to bring light we must be willing to go where darkness exists, so that the light can overcome it. This is not easy work.

The Rev. Dr. Marcia Riggs, a Christian professor and ethicist, challenges us by having us see the reality through the eyes of the disciples. She says, "The danger for the disciples is that they may lose that capacity [to be salty] by forgetting that they are to disorder the status quo by valuing those who are dispossessed, caring for those who suffer loss, seeking to do justice, showing mercy, having integrity, being peacemakers, and courageously standing for what they believe. Disciples who do not engage in such practices that humanize life on earth will be like salt that has lost its flavor."<sup>3</sup>

A question I as a pastor struggle with is whether we as a church have lost our flavor. Are we afraid to stand up and risk the potential to be reviled and persecuted by disordering the status quo? This week I experienced hope for the Presbyterian Church's ability to be salt and light, as the 225<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the PC(USA) met virtually to consider a wide variety of issues. Prior to the meeting, we shared in our announcements and Adult Ed some of the issues being raised. Next week we will share a summary of the actions taken.

A few of the decisions have already been reported in the media, including the decision to divest funds held by the church, including pension funds, from five fossil fuel companies that failed to meet benchmarks in addressing climate change. One of the most compelling acts of disrupting the status quo came from the Special Committee on Racism Truth and Reconciliation, which is asking the church to continue work exposing where White supremacy is embedded institutionally and foundationally in the PC(USA), as well as to begin work on reparative actions and restorative justice. An area in this regard that received a lot of attention was how the denomination may be able to provide additional financial support to churches of color, many of whom don't have installed pastors.<sup>4</sup> The Assembly also reaffirmed its support of reproductive choice, and added an advocacy group specifically to support the LGBTQ community.

I watched much of the livestream coverage of the Assembly. And while I may not personally agree with every decision, I can say with certainty that the PC(USA) was deliberative and prayerful, listening for the voice of the Holy Spirit and listening to voices of those who too often don't get a seat at tables of power. This General Assembly included what is known as "equity primes." These are a set of reminders that "prime" the brain to facilitate equitable action and choices. Some primes were questions – the moderators asking "What additional

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<sup>3</sup> Marcia Y. Riggs. Matthew 5:13-20. *Feasting on the Word. Year A. Volume 1.* Ed. By David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown-Taylor. Westminster John Knox Press, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> <https://pres-outlook.org/2022/07/assembly-okays-racial-and-gender-justice-report/>

information do we need to make an inclusive decision?” “Why are we trying to make the decision now – do we need more time to hear other voices?” One of the questions I heard repeatedly from the co-moderators was, “Have we heard from those who will be most impacted.”<sup>5</sup> The co-moderators were intentional about making sure the voices of young adult advisory delegates and commissioners of color were heard. Listening to voices of those who have been affected by gun violence, discrimination because of their sexual identity or gender identity; those who are living in states where abortion is no longer available or has been criminalized; those whose hometowns have burned in epic wildfires or flooded in once in a century storms that now happen with regularity, reminded me that life is messy. Our world is messy. There are no easy answers to complex situations that surround us. And it is into this messy, broken, imperfect world Jesus calls us to be salt of the earth and a light to the world.

Jesus’ imperative call for us is to be visible and change making disciples in the world. Jesus’ teaching gives us the frame for this work – the types of actions we are asked to prioritize. We are told to love God and love our neighbor. We are told to pray for our enemies. We are told to take the log out of our own eye before we complain about the speck of wood in our neighbor’s eye. We are told to seek justice, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the imprisoned.

The Holy Spirit empowers us for this call. Our worship service each week prepares us for this work. We pray that the Holy Spirit opens our hearts and minds to hear the Word and to help us act on the Word. We build community as we sing together, as we pray together, and as we confess together. And our benediction sends us out each week to continue the work we start in worship, to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. This morning we will mark this command with a benediction liturgy. Acolytes then will carry the lit candles out into the world, reminding us that the ordinary is truly sacred and we, the church – the body of Christ, are the vessels by which God’s love is sent into the world. Join me in prayer...

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.pcusa.org/news/2022/5/31/equity-primers-ga225/>