

**Salt and Light**

(offered with our young people in mind)

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany, Year A, February 5, 2023

Scout Sunday at St. Matthew's, Sunbury and Blessing of the Candles

Isaiah 58:1-9a, 9b-12; Psalm 112:1-9, (10)

1 Corinthians 2: 1-12, 13-16; Matthew 5:13-20

The Rev. Dina Carter Ishler, Deacon in Charge

*In the name of God~ Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.*

First of all~ we are so glad that you- our Scouts, your leaders, and your families- are here for Scout Sunday! You are an important part of our community, and we love this chance to worship with you. You are always welcome to be with us in everything we do here at St. Matthew's- you matter very much to us.

In our service today, you heard four different readings from Holy Scripture, or the Word of God. Scripture has one

overarching purpose: to tell the story of what we call salvation history- how God has always longed for all people and all creation to know God's healing mercy and love. What you just heard me read is from one of the four Gospels- the word "gospel" means "good news", and each Gospel teaches us about the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth- sometimes in the very words that we believe he said. I love it when these stories have a particular connection with our own lives, and today I want to connect some very practical parts of this story- how Jesus says we are all salt and we are all light- with some of the ways that being a Scout is helping you to do this, as you shared with us through your Scout Law Prayer. This prayer can be found in our bulletin so we can all see it.

I thought I'd begin our conversation today by asking you a question- and you can nod your heads or raise your hands if you

want to- do you like to go to McDonald's, or Burger King, or Arby's? Do you ever get their French fries? Are they salty enough for you or do you add salt to them with little packets like these?

Salt is something we're all familiar with, isn't it? We buy it at the grocery store and it sits on the table next to our pepper shaker, or we use these little packets for picnics or camping. Even those of us who really like it on our food, though, probably don't think of it as something so important we can't live without it (well... I know a couple of people who do feel this way.) But in the time of Jesus, salt was a big deal. Jesus used familiar things like salt and light as examples in his stories to help the people listening to him- ordinary people, just like us- to understand the deeper meaning of his stories, and we still do the same thing today.

Salt was highly valued in the ancient world. It was considered by the Roman people who lived when Jesus did to be the purest of all things. To be a follower of Jesus, both then and now, is to try to uphold the pure standard of Jesus' teachings in a world where our human standards are not always as high as they should be. We are called to live so that what we do and say always points back to God, not allowing ourselves to be tarnished or corrupted by the things of this world.

Salt is a food preservative and a very important one- it is used to keep food from spoiling or "going bad" so that we can eat it without getting very sick. It's a little hard for us here in 2023 to imagine but there were no refrigerators in Jesus' time- it was a very hot climate especially during the day so there weren't even any ice cubes people could use to keep their food cold. In

some parts of the world today salt is still the only way to preserve food so it can last longer than a couple of hours. Have you ever had jerky on one of your camping trips? That's a perfect example of a food that is dried and preserved with salt and other spices so it's safe to eat when we're traveling and don't have a refrigerator handy.

We can imagine Jesus telling us that we are called to “preserve” the goodness of things, to keep them from “spoiling” or being ruined, so that the goodness of God can be known to all people. Now we are not a hamburger, of course, or a piece of raw chicken- we are human beings, but I think Jesus' imagery is helpful-if we're left in unsafe conditions and not carefully preserved we could become kind of ‘rotten’ too, no longer of any use to anybody. We want to remember that we are called to be a kind of “preservative” in the world that helps to stop the

spread of ugliness and corruption, to work instead for the health and wholeness that we know God wants for us and for all of God's creation.

Salt is also used to make things taste good, not only keeping food safe from spoiling but helping to make it delicious to eat- like our French fries, right? In the same way that salt enhances the flavors of food, the followers of Jesus should stand out as those who "enhance the flavor" of our lives in this world. We are called to "season" this world for good- to show the love of God as made known in the person of Jesus in everything we do.

As with salt, the people of Jesus' time thought of light very differently than we do, because remember there were no electric lights, no phone or computer screens flashing all over the place,

not even those big bright battery powered lanterns you take on a camping trip. The kind of lights they did have were very different than we are used to seeing, probably something like this candle. They were hard to light, took a lot of oil to keep burning, and weren't really very bright. Jesus' audience would have laughed out loud at the thought of someone lighting a lamp and then hiding it under a basket of some kind- if you didn't put it up on a lampstand then it wouldn't shed enough light to see by. This imagery should be pretty clear- we are called to be the kind of light that shines out strongly and scatters the darkness of this world, that points always to the one true Light which has come to us in the person of Jesus. It is this presence of Light within us, guiding us as it lights our own way forward, that gives us the opportunity to be Light to others. Just as salt can lose its saltiness and no longer be able to do what it is meant to do, lights can go out, and then darkness can take over, and we know

this is not of God, because the scriptures tell us that God is Light. The main job of a light is to be seen not just by some people, but by everyone; lights also guide us to see the right path for us to take; and lights can warn us when there is danger ahead and we should go another way.

I personally think these are helpful images, and they make Jesus' teachings much clearer to me- but just because we understand them does not mean that they will be easy. To be called to anything by God is both a gift and a challenge- a challenge to live up to this way of being in a world filled with things that distract us and tempt us away from what we know is right. We are all very different people with different opinions and different ways of seeing the world, and we can do this work wherever we are- in the school cafeteria or on the playground, or in our grown-up workplaces or waiting in line at the grocery



store or when we're stuck in traffic! I found your scout prayer to be so helpful with this. It lists a number of things that you hope to "preserve" in your lives as Scouts, and it describes ways you can be light in the dark and broken places of our world. You pray you can be trusted and remain loyal when the darkness of dishonesty and faithlessness is all around you, that you will be courteous, kind, and cheerful in a world where ugly and hurtful behavior can feel overwhelming. You pray to be thrifty and clean in an environment that is often the complete opposite, and you pray for courage when surrounded by danger and temptation. You are shining examples of how our Gospel story is meant for God's people in all times and all places- remember, Jesus said "You **are** the salt of the earth. You **are** the Light of the world." We need people like you so much, and I am so grateful for you- our St. Matthew's community is so grateful for you and you are always close in our prayers and love. *Amen.*

