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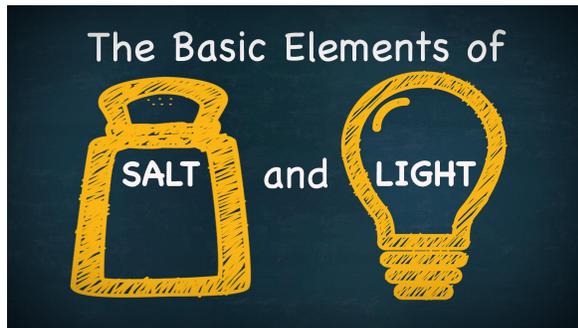
Title: The Basic Elements of Salt and Light

Preaching: Deb Strock-Kuss, associate pastor

Text: [Matthew 5:1, 13-17](#)

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Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth” (Matthew 5:13).

There is a really cool shop in Sitka, Alaska, called the Alaska Pure Sea Salt Company. And—you guessed it—they sell sea salt that comes right out of the ocean along with all sorts of pots and shakers to put it in. It was such a fun little shop. Randy and I purchased three kinds of salt: sea salt infused with coffee beans (really good in all things chocolate), salt that has been smoked in alder wood (excellent for a smokey flavor on red meats), and fresh lemon and lime sea salt (which is terrific with fish or chicken). It all came home and was shared with family and friends. But really, who knew you could do so much, make so many unique and nuanced flavors out of salt—enough stuff to fill a whole shop!

Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth” (Matthew 5:13).

Another personal story from many years ago. Perhaps you remember that the last time I preached, I mentioned that while in college, I spent a summer working with a program called A Christian Ministry in the National Parks. I was placed at the south rim of the Grand Canyon, assured of a paying job and given free room and board. In return, I helped run a worship service every week and co-led a weekly Bible study for employees of the park.

I guess I was at the Canyon through two lunar cycles. I’ve told you already about one of the nights of a full moon, when I discovered for the first time the face in the moon—the so-called “man in the moon.” Here is what happened with the *other* full moon that I experienced that summer.

Jesus said, “You are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14).

At the south rim of the Grand Canyon, there are several different trails that lead down to the Colorado River at the bottom. The easiest is the Bright Angel Trail. Bright Angel is also a somewhat steeper trail as it continues up the other side of the Canyon, ending at the north rim.

Well, so it was—with the light of the full moon above—that five of us hiked at night from the top of the south rim down to Bright Angel Campground at the bottom of the Canyon. We pulled sheets out of our daypacks and slept a handful of hours on the ground beside the river and under the light of the nearly bright-as-day moon and stars. At daybreak, we began the arduous ascent out the other side to the top of the North Rim. Wow! That was some work, and what a life-altering experience.

The light of the most beautiful full moon I will ever see to show us the way down—and the light and warmth of the sun to guide us back out the next day. I'm sure you also have a story or two you can share about moments when you were among the heavenly bodies, times that you remember and that made a difference for you somewhere along the way.

Jesus said, "You are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14).

You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. These are words of blessing from the fifth chapter of Matthew, spoken to those folks sitting on the hillside listening to his Sermon on the Mount; it was an audience largely made up of people who were sick or with a disability and those who cared for them. They are also words of blessing and direction for you and me.

Jesus opened that now-famous sermon with lots of blessings, the beatitude blessings: blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are the meek and the pure in heart, blessed are the peacemakers.

The pericope, or selected scripture for this morning, follows directly after that:

¹ Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up a mountain. He sat down and ... taught them, saying:

¹³ "You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its saltiness, how will it become salty again? It's good for nothing except to be thrown away and trampled under people's feet. ¹⁴ You are the light of the world. A city on top of a hill can't be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they put it on top of a lampstand, and it shines on all who are in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before people, so they can see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven.

¹⁷ "Don't even begin to think that I have come to do away with the Law and the Prophets. I haven't come to do away with them but to fulfill them" (Matthew 5:1, 13-17, CEB).

The metaphor is pretty simple, really: We are blessed to be a blessing! Just as a touch of salt goes a long way to flavor food, whether it's plain salt or alder-smoked sea salt, a little goes a long way to flavor, to preserve, to spice things up, and to enhance our physical bodies with an essential element. So too, we

have gifts from God that are uniquely ours. And we just need to let them be known. *We are equipped to season the world around us with the God-given gifts and blessings that are uniquely ours.*

And did you know that if there is nothing to hinder it, nothing in the way, and under the right conditions, the light of a single candle flame can be seen from over a mile and a half away? Of course, the curvature of the earth makes this a little tricky, as does light pollution and other stuff. But think about that—a mile and a half from you to the flicker of a single candle. What a difference just a little light can make. You and I have gifts from God that are uniquely ours. We just need to find ways to share them with others. *We are equipped to light the world around us with our own God-given gifts and blessings.*

Like salt and light, God made us as a small thing on this planet that can make a big difference for the larger whole of humanity and all creation. God made us to spice things up, to add our own unique flavor. And God made us to shine as only each individual one of us can—a flame that can light up an entire room or take away the life-sucking shadows to guide a lost traveler home, to shine from the inner light out into a world that really needs that light—a world that needs you.

I am reminded of Michael Perry. Michael's physicality was not small. His physical presence was actually rather large. He stood at 6'2" tall and weighed in at somewhere between 420 and 450 pounds. He was a huge person who died of cancer way too young.

Michael was a unique and special child of God, a librarian for the Marion County library system who, of course, loved books, an eagle scout who loved and encouraged kids like my own son to achieve their eagle awards, the father of two precocious red-headed daughters whom he loved deeply. Michael was very bright and enjoyed technology. He fiddled with computers, establishing a computer repair business on the side.

What I most miss about Michael, however, is his compassionate heart. He loved to tell stories, a great storyteller especially with children. And from this great big man would come these amazing stories within which were tiny grains of truth—a taste of the salt of his faith, the glow of the light that he showed from the inside out onto the faces of those children, providing a glimpse of *his* walk with Jesus Christ. His stories, his presence, his love.

Michael was a big man who found his own way to be "salty" and "luminous" with others. He claimed and embraced and lived out these gifts with his own flavor of a little bit of salt, his own spark of a little bit of light. He claimed them and went out to share those blessings with others. They weren't buried under the bushel baskets of his other talents or of his enormous body. I miss his witness.

We have all been blessed to be a blessing in the world one way or another. What flavor is your salt? How are you sharing it? Do you know how to access the light inside you and shine it forth for others to see? Choosing to live a way of life that is pleasing to God should be the direct response to the blessings that God has given to each one of us. So how are *you* doing with that?

Our good works, the things we choose to do to help one another, are *not* strategies for earning God's favor or acquiring blessings. Quite the contrary, it's the other way around. Our works, what we *do* in this world, are tangible ways to respond to the ways we have been blessed, to bless the world with joy and love. Blessed to be a blessing. After all, it's hard to forget the person who has come to you with a light in a dark time, who brings some spice and flavor to times of bland or bitter existence. Right? Perhaps you, too, can be that light for someone else.

We can choose to work for justice, to love our neighbor as ourselves, to forgive, to show a path to God, to fight for peace (now there's an irony for you—"fighting" for "peace"). By choosing to live lives that share the blessings of salt and light with others, we are *fulfilling* the law as set forth by Moses in the Old Testament. Jesus said it in verse 17:

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17).

Jesus is pointing out to his listeners that what he has to say to them may appear on the surface to be something different from the law of the forefathers and foremothers. It may seem as though he is going against what had been taught for centuries.

But in fact, says Jesus, what he is teaching is about bringing the law to life; it is to "fulfill that law, to embody its meaning, spirit, and substance. "What I'm saying to you and teaching you," argues Jesus, "is about staying true to the inner substance (the salt and light within you) and staying open-minded with regard to how you express those blessings.

In other words, to follow the laws of Moses superficially isn't enough. It is not that black-and-white. It's not that easy. What really counts is to "fulfill" the law, and this takes thought. It takes work. It takes courage sometimes. It takes joy sometimes. It might take surprising forms, look very different from what you imagined it would look like. For instance, it might mean that a "fast" consists of "sharing your bread with the hungry" or of "bringing the homeless poor into your own home" (from Isaiah 58:7).

Genuinely following God's law, truly being salt and light, means staying true with regard to what you know to be true, what is your internal substance and giftedness from God. Stay true to that, and stay open-minded with regard to outer forms. How we express the blessings given to us may differ, but letting that salt remain salty and full of flavor and letting that light shine boldly without being hidden by darkness or a bushel basket, well *that* is fulfilling God's law, even in this our 21st century.

Or let's consider another way to talk about all this. We have been "called" right? Many are our blessings. We are called to stand up for what is right and just, to work for love in the world, to put our faith into action, to fulfill the law with our own flavor of salt and luminescence. How that's done today looks different than it did in Jesus' day, but we are starting out with the same blessings that those hearing Jesus so long ago had. And it is up to us—me and you—to determine how to fulfill the law with

assurance that “whoever does the commandments and teaches them will be great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:19).

Like a pinch of salt or a spark of light, you can be the difference. You can be the change you want to see. Think about it. Pray about it. Do it. For you are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. Go from here to be a blessing, Disciples.

Amen.