

February 5 2017

Matthew 5:13-20

The Message Bible puts it like this:

13 "Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You've lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage.

14-16 "Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven."¹

When I asked Nikolai to use less salt in his cooking, my pleas fell on deaf ears! I do like the taste of salt, particularly on potato chips but I know that too much salt is bad for me .. Today we are often urged to use salt in moderation or not at all, and gourmets tell us to buy saltier (& more expensive!) salt. There's no pleasing everyone. But Jesus says we are salt.

Salt served as currency in some ancient civilisations. The English word 'salary' comes from the Latin word sal, 'salt': soldiers in the Roman army were paid a salt allowance. Salt not only strengthens flavour and preserves food but in ancient times was rubbed on newborn children, used to seal covenants, sprinkled on sacrifices, and understood as a metaphor for wisdom.

So, what does it mean to be salty?

Maybe it means to add some spice to life, to help preserve life. Just the right amount makes such a difference to a meal. I know that salt is more-ish. So if I am salt, it means that I am valuable, that I preserve and spice things up. Salt brings out the flavour in whatever it is you're cooking.

How might that look in our Cathedral in our community? Knowing that we bring out the flavour of God in life. It's certainly a different perspective to mission and evangelism.

We bring out the flavour of God, the 'God flavour' in life.

How about light?

We're used to light at the flick of a switch; in those days dark was dark & light was light & never the twain would meet till someone lit a lamp or a torch. That point lies behind all the darkness-light imagery of the Gospel. There's no mistaking Christians who're light from those who are not. We shed light on issues. We shed the light of the gospel, we literally shine. We live in love and compassion and shed light on our community, reveal God's Glory. 'You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world.' The Message

In every age, we know that "light" means many things, not the least of them hope. Earlier in his Gospel (4:16), Matthew spoke of Jesus by recalling the words of the prophet Isaiah (9:2a), that "the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light." Those who feel lost, or in despair, or confused, those who have no idea which way to turn: on them "light has dawned." In Jesus, we find our way, and in turn, we're called to be the Body of Christ in the world today: Jesus tells us to "let our light shine before others," to let the good things that we do, rather than pointing to us, radiate God's own goodness and love in the world." Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, said:

¹ <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+5%3A13-20&version=MSG>

People are like stained-glass windows. They sparkle and shine when the sun is out, but when the darkness sets in, their true beauty is revealed only if there is a light from within. We are salt and light.

I wonder. Can salt really lose its saltiness? Doesn't it just dissolve? And are candles ever put under bushel baskets? Wouldn't that snuff the flame or, worse, start a fire? Maybe Jesus is implying that one can lose one's status as salt and light. Or maybe he's just naming the absurdity of the possibility of losing one's character as salt and light in order to underscore the reliability and resilience of the gift he bequeaths. "You are the salt of the earth! You are the light of the world. That's the way it is and that's the way it will stay. Full stop."²

What sort of flavour do we add, what sort of taste in the mouth?

Rachel Naomi Remen³ tells the story of when she was a little girl in third grade. She was walking with her mother down the street in New York, in the middle of crowds walking backwards and forwards beside her.

She had been put into a special class at school because she had done well on an IQ test. The new teacher told her that being in that class meant that she was brighter than most of the people in the country. As she walked along she remembered this and was filled with an eight year old's outrageous pride.

She told her mother that the teacher had said she was smarter than most of the people around them. Her mother stopped immediately and knelt down so that they were at eye level with each other. As the crowds flowed past on either side her mother told her that every one of the people around them had a secret wisdom: each of them knew something more about how to live, about being happy, about loving than she did.

She looked up at the people passing by. They were all adults. "Is this because they are all grown-ups mama?" "No darling, it will always be that way" she said "it is how things are". Suddenly Rachel wanted to know them all, to learn from them, to be friends.

This lesson became lost among the many others of her childhood but soon after she became a physician she had a dream that was so powerful that she remembered it even though she did not understand it.

In the dream she was standing on the threshold of a doorway. People were passing through the door. She couldn't see where they were going to or where they had come from but this didn't seem to matter. She met them one at a time at the door way.

As they passed through they stopped and looked into her face for a moment and handed her something, each one something different. They said "here, here is something for you to keep". And then they went on. She felt enormously grateful.

Perhaps we are all standing in such a doorway. Some people passed through on their way to the rest of their lives, lives that we may never know or see. Others passed through it to their death and the unknown. Everyone leaves something behind.

When she woke from that dream, she had a sense of the value of every life.

Maybe everyone has some of that salt and light if we only open our eyes, perhaps we'll see and hear, and learn of God?

² <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?m=4377&rp=blog53&post=1543>
David Lose

³ Rachel Naomi Remen *My Grandfather's Blessing, Stories Refuge and Belonging*, Penguin Books 2000

Sarah Bachelard writes

The poet W.B. Yeats said, 'there is another world, but it is in this one'. One of the things that inspires me about a local parish church is that it witnesses, by its simple presence, to the reality of this 'other' world and invites anyone to share in it. It makes visible the deep and timeless current of love, forgiveness, and grace which, though we sometimes forget it, is this world's truest fulfilment and our own deepest yearning.

In today's gospel reading, Jesus calls the disciples to be agents of this 'other' world, to make it known. He calls them 'salt' and 'light', their very presence flavouring and illuminating, enlivening and preserving their communities. This commission means not denying or replacing the world, but transforming it. We begin to fulfil it, not by performing heroic feats of religious righteousness, but by being ourselves transformed. 'You are the salt of the earth', Jesus says; 'but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored?'

Last week's beatitudes and our reading from 1 Corinthians point the way to this transformation, this restoration of our 'saltiness'. Poverty of spirit, the vulnerability of unknowing, giving up self-righteousness. And as we consent to walk this way, who knows what other gifts of love might be set free around us?

Take a moment to notice the God-flavours you highlight in your life. Notice the God-colours you reflect in life.

Be the beautiful one God has called you to be. God shines through you. God flavours through you.

Susanna Pain