

Natalie W. Bell
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 Vital Congregations Series #1

Lifelong Discipleship
Acts 2:42-47, and Matthew 5:13-16

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.⁴³ Awe came upon everyone because many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.⁴⁴ All who believed were **together** and had all things in common;⁴⁵ they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.⁴⁶ Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts,⁴⁷ praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord **added** to their number those who were being saved.*

Matthew 5:13-16:

*"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 under foot.*

*14 "You are the **light** of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid.*

15 No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.

*16 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.*

Isn't there something fascinating about the **origin stories of heroes**?

It's so neat to learn about the early lives of saints like Mother Teresa,
 Or biblical ancestors like Moses.

We make movies about superhero origins—
 like the early life of Bruce Wayne or Luke Skywalker...

We also love these origin stories of our **own relatives**, right?

How many of you are on Ancestry.com? It's fascinating, isn't it?

I remember the joy of sitting with my Grandmother listening to her tell about her early life with my Grandpa.

Knowing **where we've come from** is important.

And that's what we have in our reading from the **Book of Acts** today—
 we have an origin story of the **church**.

In Acts 2 we see the *Holy Spirit* come upon the early believers, giving them the power to share the good news. Once the church was ‘born’, they gathered together for *four main activities*: study of the apostle’s teachings, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayers.

That’s the origin of the church— that power of the Holy Spirit, and those four activities, the actions that changed not only *their lives*, but also the *lives of all the people* around them.

The early church was a bit like a *home Bible study*. These people were *together* a lot, And they were putting the love of God *in action*. Those early believers *shared* their possessions, and provided for anyone in need. And the world around them saw them acting *boldly and courageously* in faith.

And all of it was powered *by the Holy Spirit*— the Spirit that Jesus promised after his resurrection and before his ascension.

In Acts 1:8 he says: *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth.”*

And that’s exactly what happens. When we read the Book of Acts, we find these *amazing and inspiring stories* of the early church— stories of courage and faith, of spreading the gospel, of healing, teaching and preaching.

We see the church *growing beyond* just those first Jewish Christians, to include the Gentiles, and people from every nation. We see women in leadership, we see those considered outsiders welcomed into the community!

We are *studying* some of these *amazing stories* in our Wednesday night Bible study, as we study the first half of the Book of Acts. Hopefully you can join us for that great time of learning and fellowship!

The goal of the early church was to *create disciples*—followers of Jesus Christ— people whose lives were *TRANSFORMED* by the Good News of the Gospel.

That is still the *goal* of the church today.

That's what we are called to be—disciples—lifelong disciples—followers of Jesus, people whose lives are *literally CHANGED* by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Discipleship is not about just coming to *church* on Sundays,

It's not about just *believing* the right things about God.

It's about *following Jesus Christ*—what he said and did.

Following in his footsteps, all by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Discipleship is about *being changed*---by putting our faith in action.

Remember when we talked about “Do Love”?

We don't just learn as disciples, *we do it*.

That means we CHANGE what we do—with our time, talents, our money.

And Jesus said that being a disciple like that, is a lot like being *salt and light*.

In this part of Jesus' *Sermon on the Mount*.

we learn that we are called to *more*

than just a *personal* faith in God that gets us to heaven.

Jesus calls us to a *NEW way of life....*

We are called to *flavor* the world like salt,

and *shine* God's light in the world, as disciples of Jesus.

I wonder, what does that mean *to you*? to be *salt* of the earth?

Or *light* of the world?

And how can *we do that*,

in our homes, our schools, our offices, our community?

Isn't that especially important, in this world where our actions are always captured

on *camera*, and our opinions *broadcasted* on FB, Instagram, TikTok and beyond?

Are we living as salt and light?

Salt has been used for thousands of years.

In Jesus' day, *salt was incredibly important* for many reasons.

Salt added *flavor* to foods.

But it was also the primary way to *preserve* food from spoiling.

Salt was also a way to *preserve a contract* with someone.

Sometimes a *covenant* was sealed with salt—some from each house, they would throw it across one another's shoulders to seal the contract.

We see these covenants in Numbers 18 and 1 Chronicles 13.

To use salt was to *preserve life* in Jesus' day.

New babies were washed in salt water,

wounds were treated with salt,

salt was used as *currency*.

It was even used to pay laborers.

The word salary comes from this idea of paying someone with salt.

Even today you might hear things like '*he's worth his salt*'.

Or he's the *salt of the earth*.

"Salty Luminescence," the Rev. Chris Thomas, Day 1, 2014

If Jesus says we are to be the salt *of the earth*,

How and where are you salt?

How are we as disciples, *preserving* life,

And *covenanting* with one another,

and *sharing* the goodness of God?

Sometimes preserving life, and sharing the goodness of God is a *very simple act*.

There was a neat story in *Christian Century* a few years ago, about three housemates who *bought a couch* at the Salvation Army for \$20. When they brought it home, they discovered wads of \$100 bills stuffed inside. The total was over \$40,000. They dreamed of ways to spend the money, but then they found a name on one of the envelopes, which led them to the prior owner, a widow who lived in a tough neighborhood. It turned out that her late husband had been putting money in the couch for his wife to use when he was no longer around.

The Christian Century, June 11, 2014.

You know, salt is also a *strong chemical compound*.

It doesn't just go bad, or break down.

So why does Jesus mention it *losing* its saltiness?

He says: *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 under foot.*

Maybe it's the fact that salt can be *diluted*.

That's one way salt can lose its saltiness.

In Jesus' day, if a seller of salt wanted to cheat someone, they could dilute the salt with *white sand*—making it useless.

I wonder what *keeps us from being salt* of the earth in the world all around us?
What *dilutes* your faith?

Is it *busy-ness*? Having too many things going on?
I think that's one way we get diluted....
I think we *all have to watch* out for this.
We can become so busy, and *so focused on our OWN lives*, that we fail to be salt in the world.

We can also get diluted by our tendency to want *comfort, complacency, and conformity*.
We want to go along and get along.
We don't want to rock the boat around us.
And we'd rather *just HEAR about faith* on Sundays than live it out on Mondays.
But that makes our salt pretty useless.
Our faith is designed to *transform us!*
Faith is meant for *action*.

It's a real human tendency to just soak up information, and *leave it at that*.
But doing that has *perpetuated all kinds of evil* in the world—racism, sexism, classism, the marginalization of people.
We must *learn, and then DO* what is right.
We are called to be *bold and courageous*, like the early church in Acts!

If worship or study or fellowship doesn't actually *CHANGE what we say and do*, we are not following in Jesus' footsteps.
If we are *only watching* faith on a screen or from the pews, we are not being salt, or light.
Even if we can't be here in person, we still need to be *living our faith*.

I think of one of our members who watches worship faithfully, because she can't be here in person. But that's not all she does.
She is a prayer warrior, faithfully praying in community each week, and daily reaching out to members in need via phone, cards, emails and texts.
She is living her faith!

Are we?

Are we *'doing love'*—and putting our faith in action?

And what is *our faith doing* in the lives of people around us?

Are we *seeking the power of the Holy Spirit*—that power of the early church—and using that to make a difference in the world around us?

Jesus says that *we are the salt of the earth*,
and *light* of the world.

And here's the thing about salt and light.

They are good elements—

but *salt can STING* as it works, and *light can EXPOSE* the darkness and evil.

Salt and light are *not always welcome*, but they are always *needed*.

This is another reason we need the example of the early church.

They spent a lot of time *TOGETHER*.

Are we?

Jesus knows we need the *encouragement and accountability* of one another.

Christianity is *not a spectator sport* or an isolated faith, like some faiths.

You really cannot be a Christian alone.

It's done in *community*.

A community of faithful *action—including Prayer*.

Those earliest believers were *all together, praying* when the Spirit came.

How often are we all together, and praying?

How often are we doing all that the early church did?

Studying, breaking bread together, sharing fellowship, and praying?

This is what it *means to be salt and light*.

Jesus says:

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid.

15 No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.

16 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.

How are we *courageously letting our light shine*—
so that others see it and give glory to God?

Are we *loving* our neighbors?
 Are we treating people with *respect*?
 Are we doing a *good job* at whatever we've been asked to do?

Isn't that something we *really need* in this world?
 Doesn't it seem like we are surrounded with the exact *opposite*?
 We turn on the TV every day to violence--
 We listen every day to people's rudeness, disrespect, lack of integrity...

What if being the light of the world, is acting the way *Christ would have us act*?
 Sometimes our *ACTIONS speak louder than words*.

Once someone asked the late Presbyterian preacher and writer of the Message Bible, *Eugene Peterson*, what he would say if it were his last sermon. Peterson replied, "*I think I would want to talk about things that are immediate and ordinary. In the kind of world we live in, the primary way that I can get people to be aware of God is to say, 'Who are you going to have breakfast with tomorrow, and how are you going to treat that person?'*" In my last sermon, I guess I'd want to say, '*Go home and be good to your spouse. Treat your children with respect. Do a good job at work.*'" [All Righteousness, All the Time.](#) Scott Hoezee, *Day 1*, 2017

That's simple. And powerful.
 Some of *Mother Teresa's* wise words sound very similar:
It is not the magnitude of our actions but the amount of love that is put into them that matters.

If we want a love message to be heard, it has got to be SENT OUT. To keep a lamp burning, we have to keep putting oil in it.

What if being salt and light is *pretty simple*?
 What if it all comes back to the Greatest Commandment?
 To loving God and neighbor?
 Not just know it, or think about it, but actually *DO it*.

Sometimes that with our *actions, but sometimes it IS with our WORDS*.
 We also need the *courage to speak about our faith*—about what God has done in our lives. About how God has helped us, sustained us, guided us.
 When are we doing that?

At the end of his life, Jesus told his followers in **Matthew 28:20**:
*Go therefore and **make disciples** of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit ²⁰ and **teaching** them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, **I am with you always**, to the end of the age.”*

How are we **making disciples** here at FPC Matawan?
 How are we **encouraging** one another to be salt and light?
 And holding each other **accountable** to that?
 How are we following the early church—
 in study, fellowship, breaking bread together, and prayers?

And did you catch Jesus’ final words?

“I am with you always”

This is **not just us** doing what is right—**it’s Jesus in us**.
 It’s His power, it’s His Holy **Spirit** acting through us.

When you think about it,
 salt and light are really used to **enhance something else**.
 As lifelong disciples, we are here to **draw attention to Jesus**, not ourselves.
 We want people to see what we do, and give praise to God, not us!

Salt **preserves**.
 Light **illuminates**.

We are salt and light **for the sake of others**.
 We are **salt** so that others will know God’s love.
 We are **light** so that others can see God at work.
 It’s not about us—it’s all about **God**.

Pastor Chris Thomas of Jacksonville, Alabama said:
*We, as followers of Jesus, fulfill our roles as disciples when we **flavor the earth** and **illuminate** the world with our actions and words that ultimately **point to Christ**. "Salty Luminescence," the Rev. Chris Thomas, Day 1, 2014.*

Friends, if we are living **just for ourselves**,
 we are like salt that’s **lost its saltiness**,
 or light that is **hid** under a basket.

Lifelong Discipleship.

That is our calling.

To be the ***salt and light of the world***, all throughout our days.

So hear the ***Good News of the Gospel*** this day:

We are following in the footsteps of the earliest church.

As salt, and light.

God has given us the ***power*** to be salt and light,

pointing people back to Jesus.

And for this opportunity, all God's people can say together:

Amen.