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Salt and Light
Matthew 5:13-16

¹³ “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 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. 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.

MEMORY is at the core of who we are

as people of faith, and followers of Jesus.

All throughout the Bible, God reminds the people

what God has done for them...God says things like:

Remember, I am the Lord who brought you out of Egypt.

Or remember, I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Jesus offers bread and wine at the Last Supper and says:

‘Do this in remembrance of me’.

Right after these verses today,

Jesus says that he has not come to abolish the law or prophets,

but to **fulfill them**...in other words,

we are **encouraged to REMEMBER what God has done and God’s laws**.

We are also called as people of faith,

to remember the ways we’ve failed God.

The Psalms, like Psalm 51, that we hear on Ash Wednesday,

urge us to remember our sins...

so that we can move into a new future by God’s grace.

MEMORY is a powerful part of who we are.

Remembering helps us **honor** the past,

and **avoid repeating** the sins of the past.

Anyone remember seeing or hearing about SIGNS decades ago,
 on bathrooms or water fountains that read, “*For Whites Only*”?
 What about “*Negroes Must Sit at the Back of the Bus*”?
 Are you familiar with ‘sundown towns’?
 When signs were posted in towns all over this country warning
 ‘*Colored People*’ must leave by sunset” or face lynching.
 This was common before the Civil Rights act of 1968.

Some say we shouldn’t remember these things,
It makes people uncomfortable.

But remembering helps us *avoid repeating* the same sins over and over again...
 And it IS a part of our history.
 An *important part* as evidenced by the rampant racism of 2026,
 Something we saw on terrible display this week.

As people of faith, we are called to REMEMBER—the good and the bad,
 So that we can follow Jesus in faith and hope.

In November 1956, the Supreme Court ruled against the segregation of buses,
 and Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr ended the bus boycott in Montgomery, AL.
 But that wasn’t the end of the struggle, in Montgomery, or anywhere else.
 He knew that blacks would face violence, racial hatred,
 and all kinds of persecution when they boarded buses in the future.

So you know what he did?
 He encouraged them with the words of Jesus in Matthew 5.
 He told them “*If you are walking into the darkness, ‘Be the Light’*.”
 And then he gave them a one-page list of instructions.

He told them to demonstrate calm dignity,
show courtesy and good behavior,
be loving enough to absorb evil,
be understanding enough to turn an enemy into a friend,
don’t curse or strike back,
and pray for your oppressors.

<https://www.openculture.com/2015/12/martin-luther-king-jr-writes-a-list-of-16-suggestions-for-african-americans-riding-newly-integrated-buses-1956.html>

Dr. King was asking them to do something beyond challenging.
 He knew that blacks were being lynched,

And still he encouraged nonviolence,
rooted in prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit.
He told them to ***Be the Light in the darkness of this world!***

Why do we remember Dr. King's words today?
Because they come from Jesus' most famous
Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5.
And because it's Black History Month, and we are people of memory.
Because who we are today
depends on what we have LEARNED from yesterday.
And Jesus calls all of his followers to be the light in the darkness of this world.

We are supposed to be salt and light.
Why SALT?

Well, salt was used to add flavor, and to keep things fresh and edible, preserved.
Not in the sense of going backwards in time, to some Golden Age of faith,
but rather, to move forward into God's new world and new future.

Why LIGHT?

Well, God's people have always been referred to as light in the world,
a light that draws all people to God.
The prophet Isaiah especially speaks of this light,
So do the Psalms.

Now you might wonder, how WE can be light in the world,
If Jesus says He is the Light of the World in John 8:12?
But Paul reminds us that ***we are body of Christ*** on earth,
So we are called to be light.
But the SOURCE of light is not from ourselves.
It is the ***light of Christ shining in and through us.***

The two images Jesus offers for light are pretty humble.
A city on a hill offers light, but cannot illuminate the whole world.
And a single lamp in a room lights just the room.

We in America have often heard this phrase City on a Hill,
And immediately compared OUR country to this bright city of light.
But Jesus is not setting us apart, that's an idea that comes from American pride.

Jesus is saying that we are to be like the light of a city,
 So that others see us...and give glory to our Father in heaven.
It's not about our OWN glory, but bringing glory to GOD.

*We are participants in something much bigger than ourselves,
 The kingdom of God.*

A kingdom of salt and light.

A kingdom that brings life and flavor and light to the rest of the world.
 Not because of who we are, but the light of Christ shining through us.

So, how do WE SHINE our light?

Instead of just following some rules,

Jesus wants us to have a core transformation that changes our behavior.

Anyone can follow rules, but knowing the love and grace of God,

Can lead us *to DESIRE God's will and God's way of life.*

Jesus calls his followers to have a faithfulness that exceeds the Pharisees.

The Pharisees were not bad, they were 'letter of the law' religious leaders.

So much so that they often missed the 'Spirit' of the law.

Their righteousness was more about appearance and outward behavior,

But Jesus wanted his followers to be changed from the inside out.

We sometimes separate Jesus teaching from his way of life.

Or, focus on one or the other.

But Jesus was *both teacher and Savior, teacher and lover of all people.*

When he told us in the Sermon on the Mount to turn the other cheek, he did that.

When he said love your enemies, he did that too.

He taught about the prodigal son, and actually lived in solidarity with prodigals.

Jesus lived what he taught.

Preston Sharpe, *The Art of Preaching*, Year A, Feb 8, 2026, pg. 15.

The question is: Do we live that way?

Do we take his teaching to heart, and allow it to change us?

It's our calling to be salt and light.

It's who we are.

The song says it well: *They will know we are Christians, by our love.*

Many of us grew up learning the song, *This Little Light of Mine.*

Which I always thought was a kids song based on Matthew 5.

But in the 50s and 60s it was a Freedom Song of the Civil Rights Movement.
And the people who sang this song
knew that shining their light in the darkness of the world ***had a very high cost.***

Bernice Johnson Reagon writes about how this song is so powerful
because it is an ***“I” song, not a “We” song***, like We Shall Overcome.
Why is that important?
It reminds us that it’s a song of personal courage.

***When someone in peril sang this song,
they were saying “I am putting my fear aside”.***
When whites wanted blacks to just blend in, fit in, be quiet,
or maintain the status quo,
those singing *This Little Light of Mine* were saying,
No, I am standing up, for truth, and justice, and equality.
This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine.

Bill Moyers, Bernice Johnson Reagon on ‘This Little Light of Mine’, *Bill Moyers*, May 3, 2013.

Jesus encourages us to be the SALT, that brings flavor and life.
And be the LIGHT.

Let our light shine.
Let our light shine in a toxic workplace, standing up for what is right.
Let our light shine in school, looking out for others in need.
Let our light shine in the community, standing up for those without a voice, those
living in fear.
Let our light shine in the nation,
supporting policies that protect the least of these, as Jesus taught in Matthew 25.

The Enemy of God wants nothing more than for us to
throw our hands up in the air, and say
“I cannot make a difference”, or “This is just the way life is”.
But that’s not true.

We are living in challenging times.
Days that are fearful and difficult for so many people,
Especially those without white skin.
Those who speak Spanish.
Many of our brown brothers and sisters are carrying their passports, in case they
encounter ICE.
Is that what we want in this country?

Author and Professor Kate Bowler
wrote an article this week entitled *“Living With the Ache”*
about living in difficult times, and still doing everyday tasks.
About watching horror on the news, and still...making dinner.

*She asks: “What does it look like to maintain hope and kindness
in a world that keeps daring us NOT to?”*

And then she quotes from an essay by theologian C.S. Lewis, written in 1948,
called *“On Living In An Atomic Age”*,
when it was apparent that the world could end at any moment.

People were afraid then, overwhelmed and tempted
toward either frantic distraction or total despair.
Lewis acknowledged the danger, and the temptation to believe
that normal life must stop until fear is resolved.

Lewis writes: *“If we are all going to be destroyed by an atomic bomb,
let that bomb when it comes find us doing sensible and human things—praying,
working, teaching, reading, listening to music, bathing the children, playing tennis,
chatting to our friends”*.

He wrote this, not because the danger wasn’t real,
but because **FEAR SHOULD NOT DICTATE our lives.**

We are living in a time of FEAR.

We see horror on the news, everyday.

But we do not despair.

We can in fact, hold onto hope.

And most of all, we hold onto Jesus—the source of light.

And we shine His light, for all to see,

So they might give glory to our Father in Heaven.

Jesus says, don’t give up or give in, BE MY LIGHT.

The light of *love and grace*

The light of *justice and hope*

The light of *good news*----in school, work, community, nation,
and even in our own families.

We can courageously allow His light to shine.

We can allow it to fill our hearts and lives,
And shine out into the world all around us.

We are Sermon on the Mount people of faith.

Followers of Jesus.

When we follow his words, people will ***take notice***.

At times, they may not be happy with us.

And just as Jesus said in the Beatitudes last week,

We may be persecuted.

Others will be curious.

They will ask us questions about our faith.

And, what will we say?

How will we RESPOND, when others want to know about our convictions?

How will WE BE salt and light?

What will that look like in ***YOUR life?***

May we hear God's call to bring ***flavor, life, and light***.

And for that, all God's people can say together, Amen.