

## Title: “Be Salty and Light”

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Matthew 5:13-20

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**Lesson:** *We are the salt and light of the world; let us serve others as God's children.*

### Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Who are you? If I were to ask that, how would you answer? How would you define yourself? Maybe you are a parent, or a child. Maybe you are a doctor or a teacher. Maybe you are a veteran. These are surely true, but they describe what you do, not who you are. So, let me ask again, “Who are you?” The importance of this question can’t be understated because how we define ourselves drives everything about us. The decisions that we make every day, the lens through which we view the world around us, our motivations and desires... all of these things are deeply influenced by how we answer this question. And what’s more, consider the effect of changing the answer as you move from one phase of your life to another. How does redefining yourself as a grandparent instead of a parent, or as an adult instead of a child affect how you see yourself? And finally, consider the negative impact to your identity, *to who you are*, if you define yourself as a doctor or teacher and then retire. Who do you become, then? You have anchored your identity in a vocation that no longer exists.

So, really, this is the wrong question to ask because it places the responsibility on ourselves to create our own identity. It encourages us to define who we are from our own vantage point, and our vantage point is a sinful body in a sinful world. So, the question that we should *really* ask is “Who are we in the eyes of God?” Because *that* is where our identity is found. We were created by God and then we turned against him and sought to create our own identity from within ourselves. And so, God sent us his son to suffer the punishment for our sins so that we could once again find our identity in Him. And it comes not from what we do but by grace. Our identity is God’s gift, freely given to us in Christ Jesus. We are forgiven by God, loved by God. And in our baptism into Christ we became the sons and daughters of God. We are in Christ and he is in us. This is our identity and it never changes.

In our Gospel reading today Jesus says that we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. He doesn’t say that these are what we could aspire to, or what he would like us to become. He declares it as fact: we are salt, and we are light. And we are because our identity has come from God. So, the question is not *if* but *how we respond as* these things. Let’s look first at salt. Jesus says:

<sup>13</sup>“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.

One use of salt is to enhance the flavor of food, to highlight the taste that is most important, most enjoyable in what we eat. As God's salt we do the same thing with our words and deeds. We enhance them by *using* them to point others to Christ. We speak kindly to our neighbor and serve him not because of who we are but because of who we are *in Christ*. And because we start from our identity in God, our works are a reflection of our love to him and become a way pointing our neighbor to him. We are the salt of the earth because *what we do* brings the message of God's love to our neighbors.

Jesus also says that:

<sup>14</sup>“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup>Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup>In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Salt is effective only *while* we do something, but light is effective all of the time. Here's what I mean. When you do something for a stranger, like opening a door or repairing their house, you have an opportunity to point them to Christ, to discuss *their* identity in God and to bring them the good news of the Gospel if they have never heard it. The effectiveness of salt is in that moment. But light is different. It is effective all of the time. It is what illuminates your service to others and continues to exist long after you have left. It's the reflection of *your* identity in Christ and it draws people to God and his efficacious word.

So, when Jesus declares us to be salt and light, what he is really declaring is that through him we have an identity: we are God's children. And as a response to that identity we are called to go out into the world and share with others their identity. And we do this by being the salt and light. We do this by looking for every opportunity to serve our neighbor, and God provides hundreds of these opportunities every single day. Some may be small, like listening to the struggles of another instead of going on about your day. Others may be of caring, really caring with you ask someone how they are doing. Or maybe, as a parent you have served your children with patience when what you really wanted to do was raise your voice and declare “because I said so!” Or, maybe your service is much larger - maybe you are caring for someone day in and day out, or maybe you have dedicated a weekend of home repair to a shut-in or elderly. And maybe, you have devoted all of your time to the service of others in another state or country. These are all acts of service, acts of love, and acts that present themselves to us every day. And I would guess that many of you already recognize and respond to these needs, but how many of them do you see as acts of service to God? You see, if we simply believe that holding a door open for someone is nothing more than just a polite act, how are we being the salt that Jesus declares us to be? But, if we see this same act as serving another brother or sister of Christ, of responding to our identity in God, then the event changes. We begin to look for an opportunity to point that person to Christ - directly through voice or just indirectly through this simple action.

And so, today, we are launching a churchwide challenge. We call it the “20 in ‘20 Challenge” and it is simply this: St. Mark challenges each and every congregant to find 20 opportunities in 2020 to serve others. These might be very small actions, or they might be larger, more complex, but the act is the same: to love others as Jesus did. The goal is not simply to serve but to recognize these events as service to God and to use them to bring his love to that neighbor. Over the next week we will erect a large space where you are encouraged to record each act of service. You won’t place your name on it so you will remain anonymous but as the year progresses, we as a church, will see all of the opportunities that we have been given to be the salt and the light to the world. Towards the end of the year we will come together as a church and celebrate all of the ways that we have shown Christ to our neighbor. We’ll share our experiences and our joys with each other.

Will you join me in this challenge? Will you find 20 opportunities to serve another this year? Will you note it so the congregation can celebrate with you?

Let’s pray.

Oh Lord and my God,  
My identity is found in you, and only in you. I am your yours because of your grace and your mercy. You selflessly sent your son to suffer the punishment of my sin so that I can be called your child. I am eternally grateful and want to share your grace with others. Lord, help me see the opportunities to serve as a way to bring the good news and your grace to the world. Strengthen and encourage me to be your hands and feet this year.  
In your name, we pray. Amen.