

St. Andrew's Sermons
The Rev. John Rohrs
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Salt and Light

Today's gospel picks up right where we left off last week, with Jesus on the side of a mountain, preaching about the Kingdom of God. This is his Sermon on the Mount, his first and greatest teaching. Last week, he began with a series of blessings focused on the poor, the persecuted, the meek – the most vulnerable people in society. This week, he's feeling a little salty. "You are the salt of the earth," he tells the crowd. We hear that now, and we think of someone who's hard-working, principled – you know, the salt of the earth. But that's not what Jesus means. He's talking about saltiness – the boldness or zest that gives food its flavor. It's no good, he says, if salt loses its taste. You might as well throw it away.

At this point he was probably getting blank stares, so he tries another metaphor. "You are the light of the world," he says. But it's no good if you hide your light under a basket. Light exists to shine.

So what is he saying? He's talking about what it will take to follow him. If they want to join his movement, if they want to embrace his vision, if they truly want to care for the poor and the persecuted, they will need to be bold. It can't be half-hearted. There's no room for blandness or timidity. They had to be salty. Remember, they were living in an occupied nation, at a time of oppression and uncertainty and fear. Following Jesus meant risk. They couldn't just toe the line and go on with their lives. If they wanted to join him, they would have to exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees. They would need to live boldly, and let their light shine.

It's a clear and powerful message, but there's one challenge. What if we're not feeling salty? What if our light is dim? I mean, we all have times when it's hard to sustain that kind of faith and conviction. Something happens in your life or in the world around you, and suddenly the oil runs low, the wick is dry, and your light begins to fade.

Well, there are a few ways to handle that, it seems to me. One is to stop and look inside. When you've got a fire at home that starts to flicker, what do you do? You fan the flame, you give it oxygen and

wood in hopes of rekindling that spark. The same is true for us. It's important to seek out that fuel, to look inside, to tend to our hearts, to laugh and wonder and pray. Another word for that oxygen is the Holy Spirit. We need to make space for God to breathe in our souls and renew that flame.

So that's one way to sustain our light, and another is to borrow it from someone else. Shining light into the darkness is a collective enterprise. One light is not nearly enough. It only works if we share, like passing candles at a vigil. Sometimes we are the giver of light and other times we receive, but either way it's a reciprocal thing – we care for one another and the light grows over time.

Today's first reading from Isaiah is a great example of this. The prophet says, "If you offer food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. The Lord will guide you and will satisfy you in parched places. You shall be like a watered garden, a spring whose waters never fail."

It's a beautiful image, and a reminder that as we care for each other so too God will always care for us. Whether you came this morning feeling salty or bland, full of light or a little dim, know that you are in the right place, you are a child of light, you are loved. Take the time to look inside and to look around you and find a spark. And then get out there and let your light shine. Now more than ever, the world needs some bright and salty Christians. Amen.