

“You Are Salt and Light”

Message by DD Adams

Providence United Methodist Church

SCOUT SUNDAY

February 9, 2014

Today’s gospel lesson is taken from the book of Matthew, chapter 5, verses 13 through 16. I’ll be reading from *The Message* by Eugene Peterson. 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.

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. This is God’s word for God’s people. Thanks be to God.

Let’s pray. Holy God who is perfect light, pour down your light so we can see clearly today. Let your people be still and quiet and focused. Turn up the volume in our ears, and make this place silent as you speak to each heart and mind. Teach us and give us willing spirits to learn. Amen.

Jesus continues with the Sermon on the Mount. He tells us we’re salt and light. Salt was really valuable in Jesus’ day. They got their salt from the Dead Sea. It was mixed with many other minerals so the taste was not nearly as good as it is today. Salt was used for many things then just as it is now. It prevents decay, it’s a

healer, it melts ice (which we've been dealing with a lot lately), it's used as an irritant or abrasive to scrub away things we don't want, and it seasons food. Would you believe that every cell in our body contains salt? That's just how valuable it is for us. People can say we're the "salt of the earth" or not "worth your salt." On and on, salt can be used over 14,000 ways.

Salt and light are two things we want and need. Food without salt decays and eyes without light can't lead. 2,000 years ago Jesus was that salt and light. He was a leader who gave purpose and vision. In this passage of Scripture, Jesus tells us that we're salt and light. Without these two things, the world falls into moral decay and people lose their purpose. They fall down because the light of God in their heart is dim. Their vision is eclipsed. Most people are looking for strong leaders. That's what Jesus and his followers provided.

Many will stand up for what's right if someone will only be the first to lead. Countless people don't know the way that leads to life unless they're given the example to follow. Jesus said *we're* to be salt and light, but it requires courage. It requires being an example much more than it does saying the right words. It means being channels of love, care, assistance, and the giving of time and anything else that's needed. It requires courage yes, but mostly action—action that puts people first and sees the great value in relationships. It means you're not afraid to open up to people and get personal.

I've read that Scouts do about 40 hours of volunteer service in a community annually. And their service doesn't stop there. Many continue to lead when they grow up and have families of their own. They're role models in their community; this is what it means to be salt and light. The Boy Scouts of America, since its founding in 1910, have always required its members to promise to do their Duty to

God. There's something about a connection to God that makes people leaders of integrity and value.

So what is it that Jesus is trying to say about salt and light? He's using these two things as a metaphor—a likeness. I think one point is this. We're told by a great leader, Jesus, that *we're* salt and light. People see our good deeds. When they see our good deeds they recognize where these deeds originate from. All great leaders are mentored by someone.

In the New NRSV of the Bible, verse 16 in this passage says to “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” The translation Chris read earlier goes like this, “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.” It's seems that doing things like God would do, like being salt and light—which God says we are—motivates others to do the same. It works like a magnet to draw others to God. The good deeds we do are meant to draw attention and point others to the source—God! That's why we're here—to be the salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors and God-colors of this earth.

Salt is an irritant too—an abrasive. Sometimes God uses us as a warning light in our community. We might try to bring a stop to something that's a dangerous situation. We march to a different kind of drum. Selfishness is not for us. We share our time and see value in building up our community. Our aim is to serve and give, to help and care for others who aren't able to care for themselves. So what's this salt and light all about any way? I think what we're talking about is influence. We have a need to influence for the good in this world. We're here to make a positive difference in the lives of others.

The challenge to being salt and light in the world and to make a positive influence in the lives of others is this. We have to work at it. We don't give up. We don't toss in the towel because we lack the time or we'd rather have more time for ourselves. We have to find the strength within to do what's right. We have to stick with the right crowd and find right influences that will help us when we're going down the wrong path.

It's easy to let your light shine around others who are filled with light. It's really hard to be light when you're around darkness. Scouts, you may *find that* to be a challenge if you go off to college. All you need is just a small light from within. Imagine if this sanctuary were completely dark right now. No light at all. Now imagine how much light just one small candle would give off. It would light the whole room so everyone could see. It wouldn't be bright light, but sometimes that's all you can muster.

Have you ever felt like your light was about ready to go out or your saltiness was losing its flavor? Maybe your first response to that feeling is to isolate yourself from others. Don't make that choice! Put yourself around someone who is a positive influence, and you'll find your light within will be blown into an instant flame! It's God's light in others that can spark that smoldering wick in us.

You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world," Jesus said to his followers. If you find yourself wanting to be a positive influence in the lives of others be salt and light. Realize you're of great value, and remember all the different and positive ways you're an impact on your world. So pick up the salt shaker and shake it! Reach your hand into the bag of salt and spread it around! Pass the salt and turn on the light! You are salt and light. Amen.