

## Sermon

February 5, 2023

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So here we are, almost to the end of this short green season, Sundays after Epiphany, and you'll recall that Epiphany was when the star led the magi to Jesus – and during this season, we wear green to remind us that it is a season of growth: growth in our understanding of who Jesus is, and who Jesus is for us. So, I like to tell the guys “think of a big light bulb coming on;” we're understanding Jesus, the incarnate God, more fully during this season. So, we have the call of the disciples, we hear about what Jesus is doing, and why he is here.

So this text follows directly on last week's text; so the sermon wasn't that short, sorry, no. He goes on longer, like the rest of us with a lot to say. And this part of it is, maybe, not as well-known and a lot more confusing. So, what is going on with this “salt” and this “light,” and comparing the people to the Pharisees and the scribes?

Well, salt would have been a very common thing. They would have known that it provides flavor, and it preserves, and it's necessary. So if it's no good, it's no good. It's comparing that to us. And if you tie it in with the Old Testament reading, as it's intended to be here, we know what we are called to be and to do. God knows when it's a sham. So, as the sacrifices are not enough, look around you and see what is needed.

But it's not those things that provide for us salvation. So in this text, Jesus might sound a little bit like he's taunting the people, because they would not have been considered as righteous as the scribes and the Pharisees, the people who had the time and the luxury to follow all the laws and to study them. And Jesus is saying, “you cannot do it on your own.” Well, we already know that.

And so when I was reading these texts and thinking about them this week, what I really heard about how we're learning about who God is, is what God desires for us. Our God is a compassionate, loving God, calling us into communities of care, where we are aware of our own needs, and the needs of those around us; where we value relationship and what is to offer; where we clothe, and feed and tend, not because we have to, but because we see God in the face of the Other, because we recognize the gifts we have received. And we recognize the gifts that we need, that we're willing to *receive*, as well as to give.

So when I was in these texts, I was thinking about *purpose*: what is God's purpose, and what is our purpose?

And God sent Jesus into the world, God incarnate in the flesh, in our midst to draw us back into relationship with God. And it's out of that relationship that we are freed, to do all of these other beautiful things that are talked about in our scriptures for today: To shine, to add flavor, to care for, to tend, to love, to forgive, to allow people to grow and to thrive. So, I thought that they were really quite beautiful texts.

And I shared, when I was here preaching not too long ago, that I'm on the Lutherwood board now – Lutherwood's a camp and retreat center up on Lake Samish. (Not to be

confused with Lake Sammamish) Lake *Samish*, up by Bellingham, and they had their annual meeting on Saturday. So, I was driving back from the meeting, and there was this great story on NPR about storytelling, and how we tell stories that we actualize, that are self-fulfilling prophecies.

And you know that I struggle with chemical sensitivity, and one of the things that chemical sensitivity does to you, is your brain gets stuck in negative stories about yourself and the world around you, and you have to constantly be recognizing that, and correcting, so that all the things that your body's feeling, lessen.

So I was thinking about how great that image fits with our readings for today, because we're learning about who God is, and we're learning, in that, about ourselves. So what stories are we telling about ourselves, and about the world around us?

Are they the same as the story *God* tells about us, as forgiven, seen, known, necessary, loved, sent – or are they stories about despair, and hurt, and darkness, because that's what we hear in the news, and that fear that that can engender and grow – are we being shut down?

So, I heard in our texts for today, along with many other things, this call to *claim our stories*, and to tell them the way our Creator tells them about us, and about our families, and about our communities, and about this world. To recognize that God has put us here in this place, to be light: to work towards healing, and wholeness, and life. That we have been *gifted* in order to do this, that *each of us have been gifted*, that each of us is *necessary* in this fabric that we call community.

You are the salt of the earth.

You are the light of the world.

God brings about salvation. But we, each of us, can impact, *every single day*, how we feel about ourselves, and how the communities around us are doing.

So I attribute this to Mother Teresa, but others have told me they've heard it attributed to others – so, attributed to somebody with a good heart, right?

“You can do no great things. Only small things with great love.”

Here we are, gathered as the body of Christ, gifted with this Word, and a community that cares about us. And today we will hear an invitation where you are invited to feast on this meal. This body, broken, and this blood, poured out for you – that you might have life, and life in abundance; that you might feel the weight of your sins and doubts and fears fall off your shoulders; so that you can be released, as you are sent out into the world, to continue to spread the good news.

And in our God, there is room for everyone. In our God, our sins are forgiven; we are seen for who and what we are; we are called to repentance and new life.

We are necessary, and loved, and good.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.