

5 Epiphany 2016 Grace, Paris

Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth."

Believe it or not, there is a book titled *Salt: A World History* by Mark Kurlansky that tells the entire known history of salt. Kurlansky says, "Salt is so common, so easy to obtain, and so inexpensive that we have forgotten that from the beginning of civilization until about 100 years ago, salt was one of the most sought after commodities in human history." For thousands of years, salt represented wealth. Jesus was actually paying his followers a huge compliment when he said: "You are the salt of the earth."

Jesus also said, "You are the light of the world."

Now there is also a book called *Fire: A Brief History*, that serves to remind us that fire changed everything. When humans harnessed fire, it was a revolution. In the ancient world, fire was everywhere: cooking, heating, cleaning, safety, warfare, community, religion – all of it depended upon fire. None of us can get through a single day w/out fire or fire-related energy.

These are the two images Jesus uses to describe his followers: "salt" and "light." Notice that he doesn't say "**I am** the salt/light" - at least not here. He says "**You are** the salt, the light." Actually, the subject in the plural, closer to the good ole Southern "you all" or "ya'll." Jesus is talking about the community, the church - and not individuals. The way we organize our common life together as a people matters, because it will reach out into our world as salt/light.

Salt flavors food, but it's not meant to be the predominant flavor, so much as it brings out the flavors that are already there. Salt is a preservative: it keeps things from spoiling and rotting. Likewise, the church should bring out the flavor, the beauty of God's Spirit within each person and preserve that beauty in love and community.

And light. Have you ever sat in a w/only one candle lit in the room? After your eyes get used to the dark, you'll be amazed at how much light one little candle gives off. You can read by it – no problem. It's a very small thing, but it has a lot of power. In this time of spiritual darkness, light is the image of what the church can and should be.

So, Jesus is using the images of salt & light to stimulate our reaction in response to the needs, the deficiencies of the world. Is the flavor of the world bland, bitter, sour? Salt can help. Is something rotting? Salt can help that. Is it dark? Is it cold? Are people afraid? Light can help. The point of the salt & the light is not the salt and light per se. It's that they function in response to what is lacking in the world around them. This is what Jesus envisions for his church.

Artist and poet Jan Richardson suggests that perhaps a part of what this gospel text is suggesting to us is to discern what God has created us to offer in this world, and to give that - to be salt that will provide savor, to be light through which the presence of God is known.

We are over halfway through the season of Epiphany. “Epiphany” - a word which itself means **appearing** or **showing forth** - is a season that calls us to ponder what it is that God desires to make manifest through us, and to wrestle with what hinders this in us. There is much, both within us and without, that works against savoring and shining.

Recognizing and resisting the bushel baskets that threaten to damp out the light is a practice and a journey all its own. It can be terrifying these days to see the ease with which so many of us accept the dimming and allow the bushels that diminish our light as we give over the hard work of discernment and freedom in Jesus’ fulfillment, in exchange for the seeming security of mindless conformity.

Jesus’ words are meant to awaken us, to remind us of what we carry in our flesh and bones – of what we receive at this table: the very living presence of the God who bids us be salt in this world in all our savory particularity; to be light in the way that only we as the church can blaze.

Blessing of Salt, Blessing of Light

-Jan Richardson

By the time you come to the end of this blessing, these words will be barely enough to fit in the palm of your hand;	through marrow and bone to reach you, how they have passed through each chamber of the heart, how they have come through the layers that make up the soul: the strata of stories and questions, longings and dreams.	you will know instead they are the essence. they are the core. they are what has come through the burning, holding still the memory of fire and the imprint of light; holding the clarity that comes when all that is not needful passes away.
but fold your fingers around them and take them as an offering a sacrament a sign: touch the words	Savor the way the words are not mere residue or dross, the bitter leavings from the refining.	So take these words as a blessing; touch them to your mouth (may you taste) your eyes (may you see) your ears (may you hear) and then let them go,
to your tongue and taste how they have traveled	By their taste	

let them fall to earth
where all salt finally goes.

See the path they make
for you,
the path that blazes
inside of you,
lighting the way
ahead of you
that only you
can go.