



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School  
1611 E Main St., Watertown, WI 53094

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**Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany**

**February 9, 2020**

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**“Just Be Who You Are”**

*(Matthew 5:13)*

Rev. David K. Groth

*13 “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. Matthew 5:13”*

*Every day, Everywhere, By Everyone....sharing  
the grace of the Good Shepherd.*

**Collect:** O Lord, keep Your family the church continually in the true faith that, relying on the hope of Your heavenly grace, we may ever be defended by Your mighty power, through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

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The world needs salt. Homer called it a divine substance. Pliny said, “Nothing is more useful than salt.” Our bodies need salt. Without it, our bodies wouldn’t be able to transport nutrients or oxygen, transmit nerve impulses, or move any of the muscles, including the heart. By the way, most of us could get all the salt we need simply by eating unsalted meat.

In the ancient world, salt was so costly it was used mostly in just two ways: for the flavoring of food and for the preservation of food. That changed a little over a hundred years ago when modern production drove the cost of salt way down. Today it’s so cheap we spread it on our streets in winter. As price of salt plummeted, it’s uses expanded. In the 1920’s, the Diamond Crystal Salt Company published a booklet entitled, “One Hundred and One Uses for Diamond Crystal Salt” (Kurlansky, *Salt* p. 5), such as keeping the colors bright on boiled vegetables, making ice cream freeze, and killing poison ivy. The modern salt industry says there are more than 14,000 uses of salt: manufacturing pharmaceuticals, fertilizing fields, and softening water.

Clearly, the world needs salt, and in our text, Jesus says, “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?” In other words, when salt is not being itself, how will the world get what it needs? When salt refuses to be salty, what good is it?

Now, Jesus is not giving us a chemistry lesson. Unsalted salt is a contradiction in terms. It’s like water refusing to be wet. If it is not salty, it is not salt. I think that’s the point. *The world needs salt. You are the salt of the earth. Therefore, be who you are in the world.*

Today, salt has very little value until it touches something. Popcorn without salt isn’t worth it in my opinion. It tastes like those packing peanuts. But sprinkle a little salt on it and something almost magical happens. You want more. The point of being the salt of the earth is to take our faith, our witness, our good works out there, into the world. Don’t bag it up and reserve it for just in here. Sprinkle it around out there. When we do that, sometimes a

little magic happens. People become receptive to the Lord Jesus Christ. They want more.

Trouble is, there's a silly notion in America that faith is a matter of personal, private spirituality. Tragically, many Christians have adopted this for themselves. Many Christians think the polite and decent thing is to keep the faith to oneself. "What I believe is between God and me." Just me and Jesus.

But Jesus won't have it. "You are the salt of the earth." Then follows a not so veiled threat. If salt has lost its saltiness, "It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet." Don't let that happen to you. *The world needs salt. You are the salt of the earth. Therefore, be who you are in the world.* Be out with it. Take your faith with you into the world. Apply it. Sprinkle it. There is no other option. "Faith without works is dead" (2:26), James thundered. If it's salt, it will be salty.

You are the salt of the earth. Word order is important in the Greek. Whichever word comes first is the word being emphasized. Guess which word comes first in the Greek? "You!" "**You** are the salt of the earth." Realize, Jesus was not addressing the social and political elite. No, these were ordinary people following him around Galilee. So also with us. "**You** are the salt of the earth." Whoever you are, as a Christian you have salt to give.

Sometimes to be the salt of the earth is to risk life and limb. For a few, it may mean picking up and going to the seminary. But usually, you and I are called to be faithful in much less dramatic ways, but no less critical. It begins with the commitment to live out your faith thoroughly in the world. We are called to integrate our faith into who we are, how we work, how we vote, how we raise our children and take care of our elderly. We are called to have an impact on the world rather than simply dissolving and disappearing into the world. Clearly this has to do with works. Verse 16, "Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

What good works are you doing as an individual? Maybe it's time to sit down and really make an appraisal. How are you being the salt of the earth? What good works did you do yesterday? What good works did you do last week? What good works can you do today?

Don't begin to think it's enough just to be kind. God expects more and has called you to a life of good and God-honoring works. He has even teed them up for you. Ephesians 2, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared beforehand" (v. 10). You are the salt of the earth. The world needs salt. Be who you are.

An example: we throw salt down to break up the ice that accumulates on the sidewalk. Maybe God can use you as salt to break the ice – for example with the guest who is visiting the church for the first time. If we let them out of here without having been greeted and warmly welcomed, they probably won't come back. Maybe God can use you as salt to break the ice between members here who don't know one another, or between two family members who know each other a little too well.

Salt is an ancient way to preserve food. Maybe God can use your salt to preserve the family tradition of worship when you think that tradition might be eroding. Maybe God can use your salt to bolster and preserve the faith of your godchildren, because that's part of our job as godparents.

There are countless ways to be salt. Our text from the Sermon on the Mount, and there are many practical suggestions in this sermon on how we can be the salt of the earth . . . very straight forward things, like being reconciled with your brother (Mt. 5:21) staying in a marriage even when it's difficult (v. 31). Not taking oaths but being true to your word (v. 33ff). Not seeking retaliation but offering the other cheek (v. 38ff). Not hating your enemies but finding ways to love and serve them (v. 43ff). Giving to the needy without fanfare or even public knowledge (6:1ff). He talks about doing to others whatever we wish others would do to us (v. 12). These are all ways of being salt.

Consider some of the opportunities listed in our bulleting to be salt. Serving meals at a funeral. Joining the bell choir. Helping with the Lenten meals. Helping the first graders learning to read. Donating baby supplies to "Mary's Room." Designating your choice dollars from Thrivent. Hosting an international guest or making soup for the "Souper Bowl." Purchasing a Family Faith Box and doing devotions with your young children or grandchildren. Sharing printed sermons with someone the Lord has placed on your heart. All ways to be salt.

The world needs salt. You are the salt of the earth. Be who you are to bring honor to God.

People should be able to look at your life and recognize it is somehow different and distinct because you are a Christian. If they cannot recognize we are Christian by our works, that would be a powerful indictment against us, and a sure sign we are holding on tight to the salt and not applying it to the world.

Remember, the purpose of these good works has nothing to do with your standing before God. Your status with God is already assured by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and faith which receives the salvation he won. So, your good works do not change your status before God. Rather they serve a world in need and give glory to the Father. Be the salt God has made you to be. And when you do that, you bring glory and honor to the One who created and redeemed you.

Finally, notice that little word “are.” “You *are* the salt of the earth.” That indicative “are” identifies you as someone, and therein lies the promise, the Gospel. God has given you your identity in Christ. When you were baptized, you were baptized into God’s name, and ever since, you have been a child of God. You were also baptized into the body of Christ, into the people of God: God’s church. Paul wrote, you are “God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved” (Col. 3:12). Not holy by nature but made holy by his cleansing blood. Not dearly loved because we’re so lovable, but because he dearly loves us.

He gives us our identity. He speaks what we are. Forgiven. Restored. His children. His people. His disciples. His salt. Don’t underestimate the magic that God can work when we sprinkle our salt around.

You are the salt of the earth. Who me? My little teaspoon of salt? Yes, you. Just be yourself. Be who you are. Amen.





