

Title: Jesus Calls us Salt and Light

Subtitle: Through imagery and metaphor, Jesus tells us who we are and what we are called to do.

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then the imagery that Jesus uses to describe his followers as Salt and Light in today's Gospel begs thoughtful consideration. Salt is not all sweetness, and light is not always comfortable. With its philosophies and reasonings, the world doesn't want a worldview built on humility and poverty of spirit. They want all the benefits of a blessed life without mourning or being meek or offering the self-sacrifice necessary to be peacemakers. So when Jesus said, "***You are the salt of the earth***"¹ and "***You are the light of the world,***"² He was talking about something that occurs when a person has encountered the kingdom of God and become a partaker of His divine nature. It is God's power at work in us that makes us salt and light, and when Christ is present in our lives, he makes a difference. Salt is a necessary preservative, and light is a penetrating power that enables life. Wherever these ingredients exist, things begin to change. If we give up or cover up what makes us distinctive, we lose our flavor and forfeit our influence.

The Apostle Peter tells us, "***His divine power has granted to us everything that pertains to life and godliness.***"³ Similarly, the Apostle Paul wrote, "***For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.***"⁴ These verses give a thumbnail sketch of our Spiritual DNA. Yet with all that is freely given to us, the context

¹ Matthew 5:13

² Matthew 5:14

³ 2 Peter 1:3

⁴ Ephesians 2:10

of Jesus' words provides no illusion that making a difference will be easy. When God's people are true to their new nature, their distinctiveness inherently sets them apart.

I remember when I first came home from college after a life changing encounter with Christ, one of my brothers looked at me and said, "Either you are crazy, or you really got something." On another occasion, my mom walked in on me while I was praying on my knees one night. She had a very puzzled look on her face and said, she worried about me. My family wanted to know what happened. There was a change that made them curious to know more. At first I had a temptation to hide my uniqueness and just fit in. But I had changed, and I didn't want to hide my lamp under a bushel or be like salt that has lost its flavor.

Salt needs to be rubbed in to have an effect. Light needs a stand so that others can see its life-giving power. So if you see someone's life falling apart, you don't avoid them. You go in. Christians don't run away when there are problems in our city or neighborhood. Instead, a Christian finds a way of being in there so that the light of God may bring hope and healing to those in need.

I live in a neighborhood where everything is not honky-dory. One day, the house next door to me was surrounded by a police SWAT team equipped with bullet-proof vests and drawn guns. But it has not stopped me from being their friend. Their children and grandchildren have been over to our home and welcomed to our grandchild's birthday party. And when a domestic dispute arose, where one of their children broke into our home in an attempt to escape to safety, Ellen and I welcomed him and provided what he needed. After the incident, I spoke with the boy's father about

what happened and assured him that I was someone he could feel safe talking to.

Being the salt and light involves helping others in need. In the fourth century, a young man named Martin was a Christian, who was preparing to be baptized while serving in the Roman army. On a bitterly cold winter night, he encountered a beggar pleading for help near the city gate. All the other passersby ignored him, but Martin wanted to help. So, he took off his big, warm army cloak, used his sword to cut it in two, gave one part to the beggar, and kept the other half for himself.

The following night, Jesus appeared in Martin's dream, accompanied by angels. The angels asked Jesus where he had received half of a cloak he was wearing. Jesus replied, "Martin covered me with this garment."⁵

Martin later established a monastery in France and in time became Bishop of Tours. Our Church celebrates his feast day on November 11th.

Another present-day example comes from the life of Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, who wrote a book in 2018 entitled "The Gospel Comes with a House Key. In it, she describes how Christian hospitality radically changed her life.

Rosaria was a professor at a liberal university in California. She had written articles against the "Religious Right" and believed the Bible was just an ancient book fraught with racism, sexism, and homophobia. But, as a serious scholar, she wanted to get into the heads of these people she despised, so she accepted the invitation of a Christian neighbor who invited her to share a

⁵ Lesser Feasts and Fasts, 1997, Church Publishing Company, p. 420 on Martin, Bishop of Tours, 397

meal in their home.⁶ Through their compassionate and compelling witness, she became thirsty to know more. Their friendship eventually resulted in her conversion.

Her book explains in detail what that conversion entailed as her life was “turned from darkness to light.”⁷ In it, she describes a dividing wall of hostility between herself and believers. But that wall was broken down through a friendly couple that lived their faith.

In the New Testament, a similar wall of hostility existed between Jews and Gentiles. Some falsely believed those walls were unbridgeable. But the cross destroyed those hostilities, and through Christ’s resurrection, all things are now possible.

This New Testament illustration means that Christians can boldly engage in a hostile world, confident that the light they possess can (and will) make a difference. But it requires perseverance.

One of the things that attracted me to the Episcopal Church was its history of being engaged with culture and human needs. When people have been hurting or oppressed, our Church has endeavored to be there. And our light has made a difference. Spiritual light is not merely given for our private use but for the public good of others. We are like a lamp “*set upon a stand*”⁸ and held forth openly for others to see.

The history of the Christian Church shows that the holiest men are those who, for the sake of Christ, engage in profane and seemingly hopeless situations with the hope and promise that they can make a difference.

When Jesus said, “*Let your light shine before others, so that^[b] they may see your good works and give glory to your*

⁶ Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*, Crossway, 2018, pps. 47-64

⁷ Acts 26:18

⁸ Matthew 5:15

Father in heaven,”⁹ he implied that effort is necessary. But the one who calls us to “*Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations*”¹⁰ also said that we go with his authority and the promise of his presence. So let us go. Let us engage the world that is confused and in darkness. And let us overcome that darkness with the “*light of life,*”¹¹ which is ours in him. Amen.

⁹ Matthew 5:16

¹⁰ Matthew 28:19

¹¹ John 8:12