

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany - February 8, 2026

- Isaiah 58:1-9a (9b-12) - Psalm 112:1-9 (10) - 1 Cor 2:1-12 (13-16) - Matthew 5:13-20

“Salt and Light”

1. In her Netflix special *Salt, Fat, Acid, Heat*, based on her cookbook by the same name, the author chef Samin Nosrat highlights the role of salt in cooking.
 - a. She says: “Salt is fundamental to all good cooking. It enhances flavor and even makes food taste more like itself. In short salt brings food to life. Learn to use it well and your food will taste great.”
 - b. To begin her Netflix episode about salt, she traveled to Japan, where we learn they have over 4,000 different kinds of salt, all of it from the sea.
2. In ancient Palestine, salt came from the Dead Sea or from the Mediterranean Sea
 - a. Salt was an ever-present part of everyday life
 - i. Of course it was used for cooking as you would expect,
 - ii. but salt was also used for preserving food (like meat, fish, olives),
 - iii. and salt even formed part of religious rituals (symbolizing purity and “preserving” the relationship of humans with God)
 - b. I imagine it took people back when Jesus said to those who followed God: You are the word’s salt. Jesus unpacks the meaning to them
 - i. As salt is crucial to everyday life, so are you, by the work of the Spirit in you and through you
 - ii. But, of course, that means you can’t just sit in the saltshaker – you have to interact with the world around you
 - c. Chef Samin says that salt makes food taste MORE like ITSELF.
 - i. So maybe in a way, the impact of the spirit working through us as we interact with our community will make the community be MORE like itself, like it SHOULD be.
 - ii. Think about that – our interaction isn’t about changing society for the sake of change, but rather it is about bringing it back to its true essence, to an original state of justice and peace that God truly made it to be.
3. When it comes to light, again Jesus’ lesson is about how it interacts with its surroundings that makes it indispensable
 - a. Without some source of light, humans can’t see.
 - b. If you are sitting at home at night and suddenly the power goes out, depending where you are in the house, you may not be able to see your hand in front of your face!

- c. You search around for your phone or a candle or flashlight, and that little bit of light makes all the difference in the world.
 - d. Here again, Jesus reminds us that a light is not helpful if we turn it on only to hide it away.
 - e. Something to emphasize here, perhaps obvious but worth emphasizing, is that neither the salt nor the light become the center of attention.
 - i. Salt is on the table, but you don't eat it by the spoonful.
 - ii. Light makes things visible in the room, but you don't just sit staring into it
4. We can hear the echoes, then, of the Prophet Isaiah, who wanted the people of God to have the right perspective in their relationship with God and with one another
- a. Our faith practices aren't there to make us look good, or for us to have a competition about who is holier.
 - b. The practices are there to connect us to what is right, to show us what God needs to be returned to its original state
 - c. So our religious life is actually there to set things back to God's normal, to undo the chains of injustice, to untie those tied up by debt, and free people from the boxes others put them in, and break down everything which constrains us
 - d. To invite anyone hungry to eat at our table, to clean up the spare room for those who need a place to stay, to open up our closet so someone trembling can get some warm clothes.
 - e. In this way, God's love wins the day.
 - f. It's not about our actions or how hard we pray.
 - g. It's about that salt in us, that light in us, which comes from God, flowing freely to have its impact
 - h. Professor Melanie A. Howard puts it this way: <<“Let your light shine” is not actually a command to the human audiences... Rather, it is a command to the light itself. [People are not being told] how they are to behave. Instead, [it's about what is inside us, God's light, shining for itself.] It is not for humans to accomplish any particular work. Humans are simply to allow their core essence to be made more evident.”
5. Freely share your true self, which comes from God: let the salt bring flavor, and the light make things visible, and the focus remain on God who brings us back to ourselves, to the beloved community of justice, love and peace.

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/fifth-sunday-after-epiphany/commentary-on-matthew-513-20-5>

<https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/13043-salt>

<https://anetoday.org/ancient-salt-industry/>

Reflection questions

1. Share a story about your favorite cook in your extended family and what was their best dish.
2. Chef Samin Nosrat says salt “makes food taste more like itself... brings food to life.” When Jesus said God’s people are salt (Matthew 5:13-20), what do people “bring to life” in community through our actions?
3. In practical terms, how do we share God’s love (not staying inside the salt shaker), but keep the focus on God instead of ourselves (not overwhelming the flavor of the dish)?