

Salt & Light  
Preached by Caroline Hillier  
Mathew 5:13-20

*"You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Let your light shine before others to give glory to your Father in heaven."*

These verses that Emily read earlier from Matthew chapter 5, are part of the Sermon on the Mount. During this sermon, Jesus went up on a mountainside and then His disciples came to Him, and He began to teach them. There was a crowd around but Jesus was primarily talking to his disciples. Although we haven't gotten the chance to physically walk by Jesus's side, we are still his disciples because we believe in him and we follow Him, so he is basically talking to us. In this passage and in this sermon, Jesus is talking about what it means to be His follower. This very famous sermon on the mount is a couple chapters talking about topics concerning prayer, anger, worry, judgment, and many more, but here specifically Jesus is telling us how we should spread the word of God.

Specifically, God calls us to be the salt. I was a little confused reading this at first because I didn't know how to be a small shiny rock that is sprinkled on top of food. But when I thought of it more, I thought of what my parents used to say to me a lot when I was little and didn't want to eat my vegetables at dinner. And that was to add salt because it makes everything taste better. Salt adds flavor and preserves things. God wants us to be the flavor, the change, the impact that the world needs to see especially in a time like today when the world is so divided. He wants us to preserve what's good in the world and add flavor to it to make it better. That flavor is the word of God and the light that He brings.

*"But if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled underfoot."*

Don't let salt lose its flavor. Don't let the world dilute who we are supposed to be, who God calls us to be. Don't let worldly standards and opinions limit your relationship with God. Live out your faith boldly and don't be afraid to share the light of God. After getting closer with God, I have realized how much peace I have been given, knowing it doesn't have to be all up to me. Throughout my high school experience so far, I have run into many obstacles and setbacks. Whether it was a loss in a game, a failed chem test, or a reminder of the uncertain future after high school, I had some problems that caused worry and stress.

However, once I found God and took my relationship with Him more seriously, all of that anxiety went away. I learned through prayer and giving my problems to God how much my worries didn't matter. I've learned to see prayer as a first response rather than a last

resort to whatever fear or doubt I have. I have been trying to strengthen my relationship with God, and through that, I have realized I am worrying less about the future because I know I will be on the path God set for me. It is so peaceful knowing the help that I have when I need it. I am never alone in making a decision because I have God. Lately, I've seen my peers in school stressed about the same things I was stressed about, especially big college decisions. After reading this passage from Matthew, I've realized I have to start sharing the solution I learned. I try to plant the seed by inviting them to our school Bible study meetings and sharing what I learned from the Bible study we have at St. John's. I know that many of you aren't in high school anymore but I'm sure there are areas in your life where you can spread the solution that is the word of God.

You have the cure that is a relationship with God. It's really the best one because it can cure so many different things you didn't even know needed healing. You have a cure that can save lives from depression and anxiety. It is everlasting and will always be better than anyone can ever imagine. Why would you hide that? Why wouldn't you want to go spread it and share it with everyone you know because it works. Because if you had the cure for a global pandemic virus, you wouldn't keep it a secret. You have a relationship with God that can cure anxiety, depression, stress, loneliness, and loss of love. Share that cure so that other people can experience that change and healing in their life that you have experienced in yours. You have a relationship with someone who will always love you, provide you with wisdom, and make your paths straight. Share that relationship so others can feel the same.

Like Matthew chapter 5 verse 14 says, "You are the light of the world." Be that light, spreading the word of God and let your light shine before others.

Be whatever God needs you to be. Be the moon which shines to guide people in the darkness. There's this song lyric that I really like and it says "if I'm the closest thing to a Bible that they read, let the words they read be what you wrote." You might be the closest thing someone ever gets to experiencing God. Let their first impression of Him be through you and the one that inclines them to start a relationship with Him. The purpose of shining God's light isn't for attention, its reflection of His goodness and grace. Let your actions point others towards God.

That song lyric that I shared a couple seconds ago is from a song called "Garden in Manhattan" which I think perfectly represents in modern language what God calls us to be. As commonly known, a garden in a city isn't seen very often, but it brings life, color, and beauty into such a loud, violent, and gray environment. God calls us to create that smile on someone's face or speak those words that could save someone's life. God places you where you are on purpose to be a light in that space. Radiate God's light because you could be that sign of God's presence that someone has been asking for. This could be as small as a smile to a stranger or holding the door for someone. Be the

light that pulls people out of the darkness and introduce them to the cure that is a relationship with God. So, as you head into this week and as we prepare for our Lenten journey, think about where you can be a little bit of salt and a little bit of light in your friendships and in your family. And remember, you don't have to shine that light alone. God is with you, guiding you, and shining His light through you.

Salt & Light  
Preached by Sophia Coradi  
Mathew 5:13-20

This past fall, I attended my second Massnetta High School fall retreat. During one of our nightly debriefs with our youth group, Ridgley asked us to share something we realized about ourselves or something that had changed us over the weekend. I immediately thought of earlier that day in small groups when we did activities that required problem-solving and team building. In one activity, we had to get our whole group of about 20 people from one end of an imaginary river to the other using only a limited number of "dots," which were our rafts. Afterward, we reflected on our experience what stood out to us. Everyone in my group said that I was the first to take initiative, try people's ideas, and help *lead* the group through the challenge.

I felt so uncomfortable hearing that. Not because it wasn't true, but because it *was*. Stepping up, organizing, and helping a group move forward is something I'm good at, even though I don't like to acknowledge it. I don't love attention (though my mom might disagree with that). I don't love being seen as "the leader." It feels awkward and a little scary to name that as a strength. It's so easy to focus on the things I'm not good at or what I could be doing better.

Part of me worries that if I admit I'm a good leader, it sounds like I'm being arrogant or seeking attention. So instead, I tell myself I'm just helping or just doing what needs to be done.

Something similar happened in 2023 when I started serving on Montreat Conference Center's summer youth conference planning team. I was quite literally helping plan a conference for thousands of youth while still being a teenager. We were making decisions, leading activities, and thinking about how to create meaningful spaces for other youth to grow in faith.

At one point, a recreation leader wanted to change the flow of trivia night. Now, you should know there are just some things you *don't* mess with at Montreat, and one of those things are our traditions. Trivia night is one of the nights everyone looks forward to, and the new plan would have cut the competitiveness and energy out of it. So, I spoke up and shared why I thought it mattered to keep it the way it's always been, not because I wanted control, but because I cared about the experience the youth would

have. The adult leader listened to what I had to say, and trivia night stayed the way that everyone knew it to be.

In that moment, I didn't think of myself as a leader. I just thought of myself as someone who cared and wanted things to go well. But looking back, I realize I was already using my gifts to lead; I just didn't want to call it that. I didn't want to admit that I was a leader because I had different expectations of what that word means—like being in charge or controlling. My leadership looked more like using my gifts to make a difference.

That's where something started to shift for me. What I've been calling "leadership" is more about discipleship for me. God has created me to be who I am with all the gifts that I have. God is inviting me to live, to serve, and to show up for others in everyday moments. I think Jesus has a lot to say about that in today's scripture from the Sermon on the Mount.

In verses 13-14, Jesus says, *"You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world."* What stands out to me most is that he doesn't say, "You might be someday," or "if you're confident enough," "if you have the right training," or "if you have the right personality."

Salt and light are such simple images.

Salt works quietly. You don't notice it until it's missing. It's simple yet so important. When you're baking cookies, there is a big difference when you forget to use unsalted butter!

Light doesn't draw attention to itself; it exists to help make everything visible.

Jesus is using this metaphor to show us what our lives are supposed to do. We are meant to influence the world around us simply by existing faithfully in it as God's light.

That's discipleship. Not having a title. Not being the loudest or most impressive person in the room. It's about influence and how our presence affects the people around us. And the thing is, ***influence isn't optional***. We don't get to choose whether or not we influence others; we're always doing it consciously or unconsciously. The real choice is ***how*** we do it.

Think about a teacher who shows up exhausted and bitter every day. Or a parent who handles stress by snapping at everyone around them. Or a coworker who gossips constantly. They're all influencing people, even if they don't mean to.

In the same way, someone who listens well, treats others with kindness, or stays calm under pressure is also influencing people just in a different direction. Everyone in our lives is watching how we live, treat others, and respond to challenges. Whether it be our friends, family, co-workers, or even those we barely know. We are always teaching something with the way we live. The question isn't, "Am I leading?" It's, "What am I leading people towards?"

Later in our passage, Jesus says that a city on a hill cannot be hidden and that light isn't meant to be covered. And I think sometimes we hide our light not because we're ashamed of our faith, but because we're uncomfortable with our gifts. I was uncomfortable admitting to what I excel at, and the idea of being seen, too, was just as uncomfortable.

Jesus also says that our righteousness has to exceed that of the Pharisees. He's not saying we need to be more religious or more perfect. He's saying ***the way we live has to be genuine***. Not performative. Not just following the rules, but ***rooted in authenticity, and truly caring about those around us***.

That's where this all connects. For a long time, I thought leadership had to look bold, confident, and obvious. While that may be what it means in society, Jesus describes it as salt and light, quiet, faithful, and consistent. It looks like taking the initiative when no one else wants to. It looks like speaking up because you care. It looks like using your gifts even when it feels uncomfortable.

So maybe the real question isn't, "Am I a leader?" Maybe it's, "Am I willing to live like a disciple?" God is already inviting us to live this way—to serve, to show up, to love others in the everyday moments of our lives. The only question left is whether we're willing to stop hiding that light and start trusting that God can use us, even when we're still uncomfortable naming the gifts within ourselves.