

You know, as a deacon, I've committed to preach at least five times each year. That's a pretty nice gig, compared to a Priest in Charge or a Rector. I can peruse the lectionary and hand-pick the lessons I want to preach about. Somehow, I picked today's lessons and then wondered why. This morning's Gospel continues the Sermon on the Mount. My first reaction was how do you preach a sermon on a sermon? Surprisingly, as I dug into this Gospel, I began to hear Jesus exhorting us to care for God's world, I realized that's what a contemporary deacon is called to do, too! And I really love the simple way he compares his followers to the familiar images of salt and light, elements of nature we can't imagine living without.

Let's talk about the "salt of the earth" first. I don't know about you, but I've often heard this term used as a bit of a slur. When someone says, "They are the salt of the earth," implying simple, working class, hardworking—but wait a minute, what so bad about that? Well, I really didn't know, so I googled "salt of the earth" and found a better, more Jesus-like definition. It includes those elements, but more importantly, a salt of the earth is a person who does good works and can be relied upon. Remember, salt carried a lot more value in Jesus time. It was not only to season food, but to preserve it. There were no refrigerators, or freezers, even home canning had yet to evolve, so salting meat and vegetables to keep them long term was common. Roman soldiers were sometimes paid with portions of salt. In today's terms, Jesus might designate people who live simply, without many of the frills our world affords as "salt of the earth." In my home, each person has a computer and a car; our closets are bulging; and we eat restaurant food a couple of nights a week. I wonder if we qualify as "salt of the earth?" I daresay, Jesus was warning his disciples (and us) that it's easy to lose "saltiness."

Then Jesus tells us, “You are the light of the world.” What a wonderful image! Last Monday the high temperature never got above 10 degrees, yet the view out my window was pretty pleasant. Why? The sun was shining. Think how comforted we feel when the sun shines after several gloomy and/or rainy days. Light improves our feelings in so many ways.

It’s echoed in today’s Old Testament reading, telling us specific ways to become light and the reward of doing so:

*“If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday.”*

And the Psalmist tells us:

*Light shines in the darkness for the upright; the righteous are merciful and full of compassion.*

How privileged are we? We get to be that kind of light! We get to let our light shine before others, so that they may see our good works and give glory to our Father in heaven.

The Gospel goes on. When Jesus warns that he has not come to abolish the law or the prophets, but to fulfill them, he is answering critics. There were those who said Jesus came to destroy the Law, (the first five books of the Bible as we know it). Jesus says, “No, the law still needs to be followed, but with more righteousness

than even the Pharisees.” He was giving us a reference point, a means to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

The Gospel is clear when it says “You need to be salt of the earth, doing good works and bringing light to the world around us.”

If you say, “OK, I want to let my light shine before others so that they may see my good works and give glory to our Father in Heaven. How do I go about that?”

First of all, keep in mind that in English the word you is non specific. It can mean you, an individual, or all of us as a body. Jesus was addressing the latter. So that makes the question that arises from reading this passage, “How are we, this St. Andrew’s congregation, the salt of the earth and the light of the world? This community works hard at brightening the world for each other and those beyond the congregation.

We talked about some of the ways we do that at our annual meeting last Sunday. We will go on talking about them; you can be part of that conversation.

The best way is to take part in the team that best suits your talents. Vestry is discussing some changes in titles, perhaps merging some teams, but their work is pretty well defined by the current titles. There is:

Worship and Music—planning and enhancing our common grounding to be light and salt.

Education—expanding our understanding of faith and mission as light and salt.

Stewardship—alas, the business of keeping the electric lights on and our personnel paid, to enable us as light and salt.

Property—maintaining the building and grounds that we use—and share to bring light and salt.

Gathering—creates opportunities for us to season ourselves in each others' company, to know those with whom we carry the light and the salt.

Community Care—brings light and salt to both our own members, as well as the world beyond our building.

Don't like committee meetings? Start small. There are opportunities within some of those committees that don't require meetings. Here are a few examples:.

- \*Make a commitment to yourself to bring something to the Community Fridge once a week, or even once a month.

- \*Property can always use folks to care for the plantings around the building in warmer months and there are work days throughout the year.

- \*Are you an early bird? You could make coffee one or more Sundays every month. And if early isn't your thing, cleanup crew members are always welcomed.

- \*Ask Cathy Temple or Nancy Johnson if you can help on Altar Guild; most jobs are once a month.

- \*As your deacon, I'm looking for some folks to train as Lay Eucharistic Ministers; they take bread and wine from our Sunday Eucharist to folks who can't join us in person.

Jesus has already designated you as the salt of the earth and the light of the world; you just have to step up, add seasoning, and shine for all the world to see.