
Add Salt, Shine Light

**A sermon by the Rev. Canon Ashley Carr
The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany – Year A**

It's possible that I will lose some friends over this, but I am here to tell you that it does not matter when you add salt to your scrambled eggs. I've come to understand that Gordon Ramsey, Julia Childs, Ina Garten, you, and I all have our very particular ways of preparing eggs and adding salt. For me, it's a dash right before they firm up towards the end of cooking. Some say you add salt in the bowl 15 minutes before you whisk, others say it's as soon as the eggs hit the frying pan. Options abound. But none of that really matters. Sure, the Food Lab will talk about the molecular structure, fluffiness, etc. But really there is only one thing that really matters. Eggs need salt, regardless of when you add it in. Saltless eggs are eggy and gross, that's science.

Likewise, it does not matter which color your Christmas lights are. If you're a multicolored light person, so be it, if you're a white light person, I see you. The point is not the colors or the LED or any of that, the point is the light. Those lights are a symbol of festive joy in the Christmas season. We can all agree that regardless of the color, it's the lights that matter.

And it doesn't matter how righteous you say you are. It doesn't really matter if you're following the rules to avoid some hellish afterlife. It doesn't really matter if you're wagging your finger at others in the name of shared faith and interpretation of the law. Righteousness is being in right relationship with God, the kind of relationship that Jesus had with God, the kind of relationship that Jesus wanted with his disciples, the kind of relationship that even today, all this time later, we are called to be in. With God and with each other. It's the relationship with God that matters not performative proclamations of righteousness.

In this text from Matthew's gospel, we hear that we are salt, we are light, and that there is this bar for righteousness. It's not what the scribes and Pharisees were doing, it's something else. The text begs a critical question about what it means to be a Christian, one who follows Christ, one who believes in God, one who is guided by the Holy Spirit. What are the real-life implications of being people who believe in God and follow Jesus? Is it enough to come to church on Sunday and perhaps sit in a Bible study during the week? Maybe. Is it enough to call myself a member of the church but never go? Maybe. Is it enough to claim no institution, but to pray every single night? Maybe. These are the questions we ask. Am I doing enough to be a good Christian? Am I moving through the mechanics of my faith enough?

Well, I'd love to stand here and tell you that whatever you do, it's all good. From a salvation standpoint, I suspect that's true, but we're not dead yet, we've got more life to live, and the way I read the book, Jesus talks about living more than dying.

So, we are salt, we are light, but what is that righteousness, how do we live as Christians? What's our job? What's good enough? What counts?

Well, Jesus says it pretty clearly right here.

Our work:

Add salt.
Shine light.

You know, Jesus was talking to folks who were struggling. Faithful Jewish children of God, who were living in the Holy City of God that was occupied by this big brutal Roman government. These chosen ones found

themselves wondering what it meant that God's people were suffering, that the Holy Land was occupied by corruption, greed, and violence. They found themselves wondering what on earth they should do about this horrible situation. These faithful people were looking to Jesus for answers. For guidance.

Jesus says,

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What Jesus begs of us to understand is that all of this. All of creation. All of us. Are created by a blessing kind of God. There is goodness in God's creation. And that goodness permeates every surface, every conflict, every division. God's goodness is bigger and far more powerful than the pangs of human sin. It is the balm to suffering souls. It is the antidote to evil. Jesus begs us to live accordingly. Live life like God is good.

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That's how you follow the rules, that's how you become truly righteous.

The crowd Jesus was talking to, our world today, it's all a tale as old as time. If you look around, you'll notice that yes, things are troublesome and complicated, but they are not new. We simply have more access to it these days. If you think about it, the whole reason we got Jesus in the first place was because we couldn't figure out how to live in right relationship with God. God sent in the reinforcements for our benefit. So, no, none of this is new. But we can be different. We can change the narrative by tuning into right relationship with God and with one another.

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Jesus is quite clear that he came not to abolish the law, but to fulfill it. Right out of the gate, he's not creating division, but unity. What was happening was plenty good and still worth upholding. There's just opportunity for more. Be in right relationship. Because if we're living in right relationship with God, those ten rules from Torah shouldn't be so scary. If we're living in right relationship with God, Jesus' two rules shouldn't be so scary. Love God, love neighbor, don't kill each other.

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Each of us is made in God's image to live and move through this life with God given purpose, anchored by relationship with the one who made us so. God made us to be salt and light. To add flavor, to bring to life the dormant good inherent in just about everything. God made us to walk into darkness as bright beacons of the hope and love and possibility of God. To withhold our salt, to hide our light under a bushel, that is not right relationship, that is not living as we are made to live.

No one among us lacks salt or light. No one. From the littlest ones who sing the song to the biggest ones who cook the food. Jesus says this is who we are. This is what we are made of.

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Last week we saw our youngest parishioners gathered right here to hold lights and sing their song, This Little Light of Mine. After church so many of you told me that that was the most moving thing you'd seen in some time. To watch the youngest most innocent among us boldly shine their lights and promise not to hide it. Well, that's exactly what Jesus tells us to do. Those babies figured out righteousness.

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The headlines are grim. People are dying, stolen, and broken. So, if you, like me, find yourself looking around searching for righteousness and wondering what your responsibility is as a Christian in this world, here is the answer. Claim your saltiness. Claim your light.

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Shine light.

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