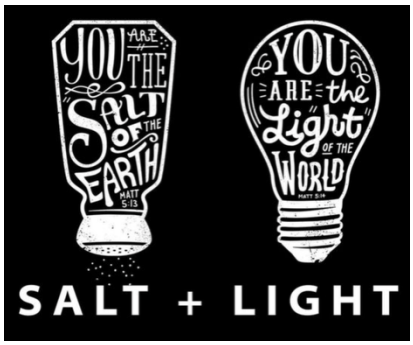
**5th Sunday after the Epiphany**
**February 8, 2026**
**Matthew 5:13-20**




# In the Kitchen with Jesus

*A sermon preached by The Rev. Dianne Andrews at*
*St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, Bainbridge Island, WA.*

Anyone who as ever boiled pasta… and has made the mistake of forgetting to add salt to the water… will probably never make the same mistake again. And who wants to dive into a bowl of unsalted popcorn? Once, long ago, when I was making cookies for my homeroom class… I misread the recipe. Instead of a teaspoon of salt, I added a full tablespoon to the cookie dough. I added three times the amount of salt that the recipe called for! Needless-to-say, the cookies were disgusting and inedible. A good soup chef knows that the final adjustments of seasoning are to be done just before the soup tureen is brought to the table. Cooking is alchemy. Combining ingredients that each have their own subtleties result in a dish whose flavor is far more than any one of its individual components. The same vegetables grown in different soil, or in a different climate, will have slightly different flavors. A recipe can only suggest seasoning amounts. It is the chef, and a finely tuned palate, that determines whether, or not, a final pinch of salt, or dash of oregano, will complete the beautiful orchestration of flavors. Salt is not meant to dominate the flavor of a dish. Salt is meant to enhance… to bring out the flavors of the other ingredients.

In the ancient world, salt was a precious commodity. Roman soldiers were often paid in salt. The soldiers' "salarium" (from the Latin word "sal" meaning salt) has become our English word "salary." Salt was used to disinfect wounds, stop bleeding, and treat skin disorders. Some believed that salt could ward off evil spirits. In the absence of refrigeration, salt is an essential food preservative. For us, acquiring salt is as easy as heading to the store, picking up a relatively inexpensive blue box of Morton salt, (the one with the little girl and the umbrella), and heading to the check-out stand. To the people listening to Jesus as he was speaking from the mountain top, the preciousness of salt would have been well understood.

Try to imagine what it must have been like for the gathered… to hear this charismatic teacher call them "Salt." Last week, Jesus bestowed the name "You are blessed"… to all the gathered. As Jesus continues his Sermon on the Mount, he says, "you are Salt. You are Light." Jesus does *not* say, "Blessed ones, I *encourage* you to be the salt of the earth." Jesus does not say, "You *should* be the light of the world." Jesus does *not* say, "you must *learn* to be salt… you must *learn* to be light." Jesus says that you **already**, here and now, you **ARE** salt and light. Just as you are… you are the stuff of discipleship, bearers of God's love in the world, ones who help bring out the best in others, enhancing flavor, waking up those around you… that God's people may know their own delightful flavor. You are to be in the world… not by overwhelming others with your presence. You are to a catalyst that enhances the gifts of others in your midst… like that pinch of salt that amplifies the chorus of flavors in a steaming pot of soup.

Remember that it is to the poor, the mournful, the meek, the persecuted, the hungry, the sick, the crippled and the frightened… it is to the outcast, the misfit, the disreputable, the demon-possessed… it is to all of these and more that Jeus said: "*You* are the salt of the earth." Debie Thomas puts it this way:

> *"You who are not cleaned up and shiny and well-fed and fashionable, you who've been rejected, wounded, unloved, and forgotten – you are essential. You are worthwhile. You are treasured. And I am commissioning you...*
> *...Jesus knowingly named a commodity that was priceless in his time and place. He conferred great value on those who did not consider themselves valuable. He is still doing this. For us. Now."*[1]

"You are the light of the world." As light, you are *not* that which seeks to be in the spotlight. Rather, you are empowered to shine the light of God's love in the world around you. As light, seek to spotlight beauty and illumine the most precious qualities of those around you. Share your light with those whose own light is but a flicker. Together, your lights will shine even brighter. Frederick Beuchner says it this way:

> *"Be the light in the world, [Jesus] says. Where there are dark places, be the light especially there, be the salt of the earth. Bring out the true flavor of what it is to be alive truly. Be truly alive. Be life-givers to others... that's what loving each other means."*[2]

If you put a bushel basket over a lit oil lamp… the basket will either catch fire, or the light will be extinguished. Be the light. When you are the light, however you do it, others will notice. You are called to shine brightly.

In 1958, Houston Smith's book *The Religions of Man* was first published. This important book brought a deeper appreciation of the varieties of religious experience in the world to the American public. The book even inspired Life Magazine to publish a series of issues about the world's major faith traditions. Each week, the magazine focused on a different religion. In his study of Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Islam, and Christianity, Smith was able to find common streams of religious experience and parallel spiritual hungers across the great traditions. The great questions that human beings have been pondering for thousands of years are: Where are we? Who are we? Why are we here? What are we meant to be doing? …and… How are we to go about this experience we call life? Though endless amounts of paper and ink have been consumed pondering these questions, the answers may be less heady and more earthy than we try to make them. Be salt. Be light. Know that you are blessed. Come home. Listen. Love. Learn. Laugh. And when it is time, pray your goodbyes. Religions provide a language, a vocabulary and a structure that helps in caring for the human soul.

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[1] 1 Debi Thomas, "Salty," Journey with Jesus, February 2, 2020. https://www.journeywithjesus.net/essays/2515-salty

[2] Frederick Buechner, Secrets in the Dark: A Life in Sermons (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), p. 150.

One of my favorite spiritual teachers, Kent Ira Groff, offers guidance for "The Art of Soul Care."[3] Here is my adaptation of Groff's descriptions of the five elements of soul care that are "Listen, Love, Learn, Laugh, and when it is time, pray your goodbyes…":

**First…listen.** Listening is the essential bedrock of grace. Listening connects us to one another and to an awareness of God's presence.

**Second… Love.** Be a caring spiritual presence with one another. While travelling dark valleys, comfort while gently confronting.

**Third… Continue to Learn.** Grow in mutual understanding of others, of yourself, and with God. Join in building God's beloved community grounded in tradition and infused with the Spirit's creativity.

**Fourth… Laugh**. Laughter is the good medicine of a merry heart. In their old age, Abraham and Sarah laughed in disbelief that a child was on the way. Laugh with joy at little things. Find the humor in mistakes. Use the lens of joy and laugh. Laughter is infectious.

**Fifth… Leave well**. Let us pray our goodbyes and equip one another in the knowledge of our dependence on the love of God, of our connections with one another, and our connections with our own souls.

"To listen to love to learn to laugh to leave,
is a movement of the Spirit revealing
the Mystery hidden for ages in each and all –
wounded healers healing,
beggars showing other beggars
where to find bread."

Amen…

[3] Kent Ira Groff, *The Soul of Tomorrow's Church: Weaving Spiritual Practices in Ministry Together,* Upper Room Press: Nashville, 2000, pg. 109.

**THE ART OF SOUL CARE**[4]

**Listening** – that essential bedrock of grace incarnate in this its first flesh, communing spirit to spirit, unconditionally;

**Loving** – a caring spiritual presence with another through dark valley, with rod and staff comforting while gently confronting;

**Learning** – mutually with others, self, God, linking the mind's corporate taproot with tradition and creativity in community;

**Laughing** – that good medicine of a merry heart, in belief, in disbelief like Sarah and Abraham – the humor of light moments, mistakes, mystery;

**Leaving** – praying our goodbyes, equipping saints for their own inter- and intra-dependence, from external counselors to internal Counselor.

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is a movement of the Spirit revealing
the Mystery hidden for ages in each and all –
wounded healers healing,
beggars showing other beggars
where to find bread.

-Kent Ira Groff

[4] Kent Ira Groff, *The Soul of Tomorrow's Church: Weaving Spiritual Practices in Ministry Together,* Upper Room Press: Nashville, 2000, pg. 109.