

Salty!

A Sermon for Pilgrim Congregational Church, UCC, Lexington

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SCRIPTURE READING Matthew 5:13-20

13 'You are the salt of the earth; 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 under foot.

14 'You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

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Last week we started the sermon on the mount and I said there were two essential promises in that passage, built into the structure of the beatitudes. Truths that were life giving to Jesus' audience in the first century and that *are* life giving today. First: you are not alone. You are beloved, you are blessed, and you are not alone. Second: the story isn't over. Hard days may come, but the story isn't over.

From those powerful and encouraging blessings, Jesus' sermon pivots to a third truth: you make a difference. This world needs you. You are the salt of the earth and light of the world.

Jesus said to the crowd of marginalized folks sitting on the hillside a ways out from town, folks who were feeling the oppression of Rome, working class folks, a religious minority, definitely not powerful, definitely not the center of attention...

Jesus said to them: you are the salt of the earth. In that time salt was hard to come by, highly valued, not just used to flavor but used to preserve food - which meant that salt could keep people from going hungry.

Jesus said: You are important. Your contribution is important. You've got a role in making this world better, brighter. What you do saves lives.

Jesus said: you are the light of the world.

You are bright and your faithfulness guides others.

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You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.

Here we are, a little church, a ways out of town, smaller than we used to be, no longer the cultural default, definitely not the center of attention, *on the day of our annual meeting*.

Jesus says...

We are the salt of the earth. We are the light of the world.

Pilgrim Church, we are salt and light. Jesus says so.

We are salt. We are valuable. A little of us goes a long way. We're small-to-medium - actually we're exactly average for the UCC these days but we feel little. And yet - our value and impact are felt all over our community.

How many times have I heard from community leaders,

Pilgrim folks are everywhere.

Couldn't do it without Pilgrim.

Pilgrim punches above its weight.

Pilgrim Church, we are light in this world. Jesus says so.

We are light. We are distinct.

There's a beautiful adage, "it is better to light one candle than curse the darkness."¹

And I am here to say, the brightness of Pilgrim Church makes a difference in strange and difficult times.

On annual meeting Sunday let me remind you.

Every time we come together to make dozens of meals for homeless folks in Cambridge, we're lighting the world.

Every time we open the Communion Table to everyone, we're salting an extraordinary meal.

Every time we bless those who are hurting, we are a candle in the night.

Every time we boldly proclaim that *every single human being* is a beloved child of God, worthy of dignity and love, that salty proclamation, that bright statement of welcome, that strong offering of support, saves someone's spirit. Maybe even someone's life. That salt - distinct from the messages of exclusion.

Every time we support a child in becoming their most amazing self right here in our midst, we're lighting the world.

We are salt, and light. Distinct and bold and wonderful.

Don't hear me saying we should be so distinctive that we don't need to grow - I think we are at present slightly undersalted on Coolidge Ave, and it would be good to turn up the metaphorical lights a little bit, and stand up on

¹ A little googling failed to find the definitive origin of this quote, but minister William L. Watkinson and Eleanor Roosevelt are both given credit for it in places.

tippy toes and wave at our neighbors with an invitation to walk up our metaphorical hill. Yes, we could.

Yet, we should not grow at the cost of losing our beautiful, welcoming, loving, inclusive salty glow. There is a goodness and a distinctness of Christian community at its best that will always stand in contrast to the ways of our world. Our voice, our light, our saltiness should shake things up.

Shari Prestemon, from the national setting of the UCC, asked this week: who are we? Who are we as church in this time?

And I think her answer speaks of Pilgrim Church as much as any other UCC church across the country:

“Showing up and speaking up for our neighbors. Leading the way with our fierce love and hope. A small and still mighty church promised courage in the struggle for justice and peace and ready to bear the cost and the joy of discipleship.”²

We are salt and we are light. So we won't stop shining. We won't stop bringing our gifts to the world.

We make a difference. This world needs us. We are salt and light.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

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² <https://www.ucc.org/who-are-we/>