

Sermon Series: Glory Revealed
"Call to Action"
Matthew 5:13-20
February 8, 2026
Rev. Zachary Hopple
Christ UMC, Lansdale, PA

Worship Question: What steps do you take to respond to God's calling in your life?

If I were to ask you right now, who are you, how would you define yourself? We get asked that question probably more often than we think. Maybe not as bluntly, but every time we interact with someone new we identify ourselves in some way. We state something about ourselves that defines who we are.

Shortly after we are born, between the ages of one and three, we become self-aware and start to figure some things out about ourselves, that we are a unique person. As we approach the early teenage years we start to get our independence and become more concerned with what others think about us, especially our peers. Throughout our teenage years we explore our place and role in this world, our values, and our long-term goals. As young adults we continue to redefine our identity and often solidify our identity through our choices in our relationships, our work, and our lifestyle.

A lot goes into defining who we are, how we view ourselves, and how we portray ourselves to others. During our formative years as all of this is developing, the support we have and what we are told often comes into play. If someone tells us time and time again that we are no good and we will not amount to anything, chances are, we will live into that. Likewise, if we receive constant support and encouragement we will have a much more positive outlook on ourselves as we develop and grow into our identity. When we have a secure identity in who we are, we can move more confidently in this world. When we know we are loved and supported, we can live in a way that is more assured of the choices we make. And so for the majority of our lives we strive to form a solid identity of ourselves.

Sometimes our identity comes naturally. Sometimes it is a process to live into who we want to be or who we try to be. But there is a huge difference between who we try to be and who we are. One is exhausting, performance-based, always striving. The other is liberating, grace-based, flowing from who we already are in Christ. Today, we will talk about how Jesus invites us not to anxious striving but to confident being, and then doing what flows naturally from that identity.

In our scripture today from Matthew 5, Jesus tells us who we are. He tells us, "You are the salt of the earth," and "You are the light of the world." In these sentences, he gives us aspects of our identity we are to hold on to and live into. Jesus is not giving us a command. He is not telling us this is what we ought to be.

He is declaring it: this is what you are. You are salt and light. You are these things already; these aspects are part of who you are. We saw this in week three of this sermon series as we looked at God giving us as a light to the nations. This identity as salt and light is not something we earned or something we deserve. It is something given to us by Christ, given to all who follow Christ. In The Message paraphrase of the Bible, Eugene Peterson puts it this way: "Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth" (v. 13). "Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world" (v. 14).

In the ancient world, salt was precious. It was highly valued. It was used to mark a covenant, signifying a binding and incorruptible agreement, which we see at least three times in the Bible in 2 Chronicles 13, Leviticus 2, and Numbers 18. Salt also is alluded to as being a symbol of friendship, loyalty, and a lasting relationship, as we see with the salt covenant, but also in passages like Mark 9. Salt adds flavor as any cook will tell you, and in days without refrigeration, it was needed as a preservative. It was valued for its nutritional value, as well as for its antiseptic, disinfectant, and healing properties. It was even used as currency at times, which is where the word "salary" comes from, specifically salt rations given to Roman soldiers. It's also where we get the saying of being "worth your salt." So for Jesus to tell us that we are the salt of the earth, he's saying that we are something valuable, highly prized, and makes a notable difference. How does that make you feel?

Likewise, light was incredibly important too. They did not have electricity back then. They did not have manufactured light at the flip of a switch. They did not have light posts every couple of feet down the road. They relied on the sun during the day and the light given by lamp, fire, or torch at night. Light could mean the difference between safety and danger. It could mean the difference between isolation and community. Light was important, valuable, and incredibly necessary for daily life.

Jesus wasn't giving his disciples a job description. He was giving them an identity, which described their place and role in this world: to be valuable, necessary, and important. They were to flavor and influence the world around them while still being distinct and unique.

However, being salt and light is not for our purposes but for God's. As Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 4:5-6, "For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus's sake. For it is the God who said, 'Light will shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."

The light we shine comes from God in order for others to see God. When we walk outside at night, light from the moon can illuminate the world around us. But the moon does not produce its own light. It reflects the light from the sun. Likewise when we are dealing with issues in our lives and someone walks

alongside us, maybe to share a meal with us or even just to sit in silence with us in our pain or our grief, they reflect the light of Christ into our lives.

As salt and light, we work in this world as valuable and necessary commodities. But Jesus warns us that we need to be careful that we do not lose our saltiness and that we do not hide our light. The scripture says, "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." The word used here that we translate as "lost its taste" is actually used elsewhere in the Bible and we translate it as foolish, bringing with it the idea of being worthless or of no consequence. But if the salt becomes worthless, how can it be made into something that is useful again?

Have you ever tried cooking something and you spilled the salt all over the floor? I know I have. Do you sweep it up and use it in whatever you're cooking? I hope not. Maybe you were cracking some eggs and splashed some raw egg yolk into the open container of salt. Would you continue to use it? Or maybe you spilled water into a box of salt and it clumped up and got all gross. At this point, the salt is pretty much unusable. So what can you do with it other than throw it out?

Matthew 5 starts Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. It begins with the Beatitudes, and Jesus continued to preach about things that almost seemed contrary to how people should view the world. It seemed paradoxical in nature. Many of his teachings started with "you have heard..." and then finished with "...but I tell you something different." He was teaching them that God's ways sometimes seem contradictory to what the world would teach. He was teaching them that they needed to impact the world around them. They needed to change things. He was teaching them how to stand out and flavor the world to make a difference. And he warned them about being contaminated or becoming unusable to the point where they were indistinguishable from the world around them.

Likewise as light they were to shine. Why would you put a basket over a light? It defeats the purpose. Light is meant to shine. So why would we hide it? Well sadly, there's many reasons we would hide our light today. The biggest being fear. Sometimes it seems as if the term "Christian" has been hijacked. In some ways, Christianity has become synonymous with hypocrisy, hatred, and being self-seeking, because people have used religion, the Bible, the Church for their own purposes and their own agendas and they don't always coincide with what God actually wants. And I am not just talking about recently. This has happened all throughout history. This is what Jesus was preaching about.

Just a few verses later in chapter 6, part of this same message, Jesus said, "So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others" (6:2). And a few verses later, "And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others" (6:5). And again in verse 16

it says, "And whenever you fast, do not look somber, like the hypocrites, for they mark their faces to show others that they are fasting" (6:16).

And we see this even in more modern history, from the Holy Wars and the Crusades to the Inquisitions, to colonial expansion and forced conversions, to slavery, all backed at least in part by people who claimed it was God's will. It's hard to believe that because slavery was mentioned and discussed in the Bible, in a culture and in a context over 2,000 years ago, one that we often have difficulty understanding sometimes, that people used it less than 200 years ago to justify kidnapping people from their homeland and forcing them into slavery. And I think that is incredibly important to point out seeing as February is Black History Month. We need to remember these utter failures in our history so we do not repeat them.

And so when we see atrocities committed by people toting the Bible, it makes it hard for others who truly want to follow Christ to shine their light brightly and not hide it. But yet that is what we are called to do. We are called to be a beacon of hope and light. We are called to be a city on a hill, a haven of safety and rescue. Jesus didn't call us to be comfortable in this world. He called us to stand out and to be transformative. That is the mission of this church: to transform lives in the love of Jesus Christ. And we can't do that by blending in.

Over my years as a pastor, I have heard District Superintendents, Bishops, and other conference leaders ask these questions of church leaders quite a few times: If our church was to close tomorrow, would our community notice? Would our community care? And if so, what would they miss about us? These questions speak to the idea that we are to make a difference in this community. We are to be a presence in the world around us. We are to make a difference. We are to flavor the lives of those we live among. We are to have an impact. We are to be a light in this community. If I were to ask you right now, what is this church known for, what would you say? If I went out into the community and asked the same question, what would they say?

Not to pat ourselves on the back, but this church does do a lot, and I think we do it well. We have a children's department that reaches out into the area to provide safe and fun events that share the love of Christ with the children in this community. We generally have around 150 kids at any of our regular events. We have members of this church that go out regularly and volunteer in ministries all around this community, serving at the Code Blue shelters in our area, helping at Manna on Main Street, Mitzvah Circle, and Liberty Ministries just to name a few. Not to mention the money and donations we collect for organizations here in town, in our region, and around the world.

We have built wells in Africa. We have purchased and packaged over 100,000 meals to be shipped to the hungry all around the world. We put a young lady through four years of high school in Kenya who graduates this fall. We support work efforts to clean up after natural disasters through our support of UMCOR as well as supplying cleanup buckets. And that is just a little bit of what

this church does missionally. Not to mention the programming we provide here at the church: the book groups, the Bible studies, the Sunday school programs, the community groups that use our space, the blood drives we host. There is something going on here at this church at least six days out of the week.

So we as a church may be shining in this community, but my question for you is, how are you salt and light in this world? And yes, many of you support what this church does, and I am so grateful. Because of the many volunteers that step up in this church, we are able to do what we do. Because of your generosity, this church is able to function the way that it does. And I cannot thank you enough.

But when you leave this space, there is more world out there that needs help. How does your individual light shine in this darkened world? You may be thinking, "Well, things are just too big. What can I do?" Or maybe you're thinking, "I'm not skilled enough or educated enough to make a difference."

Martin Luther King Jr. said, "Everybody can be great, because everybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve. You don't have to know about Plato and Aristotle to serve. You don't have to know Einstein's 'Theory of Relativity' to serve. You don't have to know the Second Theory of Thermal Dynamics in Physics to serve. You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love, and you can be that servant."

Look at Mother Teresa. She said, "Not all of us can do great things, but we can do small things with great love." She didn't solve poverty globally, but she dedicated her life working with some of the poorest of the poor, caring for one person at a time.

Jesus isn't asking you to go out and change the world overnight, and I am not suggesting it either. Our job as Christians is to be salt and a light where we are, to do something to make a difference in the world around us.

So what can we do? Some ideas: if you are not already doing so, you can volunteer somewhere, here at the church, with one of the organizations we support, or with an organization that is near and dear to your heart. One of the biggest issues that I know all non-profits in our area face is that it is hard to find people to help do the work. You can simply write a note of encouragement to someone. You can check in with your neighbors and make sure they are doing okay, especially with this cold weather we have been having. You can pick up trash in your neighborhood or at the local park. You can be present at community events or meetings. You can think a little bigger and write or call your local officials or state representatives to affect change in our society. You can look for a need in your community and see how you can help fix it.

We are salt and light. That is what all believers who follow Christ are. As salt and light we are to function in this world to make a Godly difference in love.

Our scripture concludes with Jesus giving us the foundation beneath our actions. He roots everything in God's enduring faithfulness. He talks about his

mission to fulfill all of the law, completing it, which only he could do perfectly. The heart of the law was never about being legalistic but had always been about love: love for God and love for neighbor.

And Jesus concludes our scripture for today saying, "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." This was not Jesus raising the bar impossibly high, he was changing the game entirely. The Pharisees focused on external rule-keeping, on performance, on keeping up appearances. But Jesus calls us to purposeful transformation, an internal transformation for ourselves to authenticity with hearts overflowing with love, and to transformation through our love for our communities and the world around us.

And again, we do this all through Jesus. We do this in the name of Jesus. We do this for the love of Jesus. We do this in the love of Jesus. We do this in the power given to us by Jesus. Because if we try to do this all on our own, we will burn ourselves out rather quickly. But when we are rooted in God's faithfulness, we serve from fullness rather than emptiness. We serve from the blessings God has poured into us and overflows out into the world around us, rather than from what we try to force out into the world on our own.

You are salt. You are light. Not because of anything you've achieved on your own, but because of who Jesus is in you and through you. The glory we've been celebrating throughout Epiphany, the light that drew the magi, the presence revealed in baptism, the call to be God's light - that glory now shines in us. Not because of who we are, but because God is faithful and because of who we are in God.

So the question today is not, "Am I good enough to be salt and light?" The question is, "Will I let the salt and light that's already in me season and illuminate the world around me?" And so I challenge you: find something specific to do this week, not to earn God's love because you already have that, not to prove you are a good Christian because Christ has already made you righteous through his blood, but to participate in the work of God already going on in the world around you.

You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. Not someday. Not if you try harder. You are. Right now. So go and be who you already are. Let your light shine. Not for your glory, but for God's. Not out of obligation, but out of overflow. Not alone, but together. Because God's glory has been revealed to us; it shines in us. So let us let our light shine, and may others shine alongside us until all the world will see God's glory.