

Back when I was working as an OR nurse, I may occasionally have been accused of wielding a bit of salty language. You know, OR nurses and truck drivers share a certain reputation in that department. Life up close tends to sound less polite. And there's no disrespect intended. It's just part of the camaraderie, humor, and getting through those long days together. But yeah, it's vocabulary that wouldn't always pass muster in polite church company.

And let's just say, I am no innocent. But the collar helps keep me a little more in line now. Mostly 😊

And of course, when Jesus calls his followers salt, he's not talking about my errant vocabulary. He's talking about people who show up with honesty when things matter. Because when life is happening in real time, we might need people who are a bit salty.

In this portion of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus simply tells us who we are, *"You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world."* Hummm...

And honestly, he doesn't tell us much more than that. No step-by-step explanation. No instruction manual. Just two common everyday images, and then he leaves those metaphors with us to ponder, to play with, and to pray over.

Typical Jesus, don't you think? He gives us something to live into rather than something to memorize. Something to spark imagination. Something for us to carry around, to chew on, and discover more about it as we go along.

You know, I think that feels timely for us here at Atonement, because this parish is stepping into another season of adventure and discernment. Over the next year we'll continue to ask, as we have for the past few years, *who we are becoming? AND where God is leading us next?* About a year from now we'll begin calling a new priest, and someone new will walk into this community wondering, *Who are these people? What kind of congregation is this? What kind of life is here?*

So I think it's timely that Jesus seems to be asking us today, *Will they see our light? Will they taste the salt of our life together?*

So let's accept that invitation to play with Jesus' images a little.

What do we know about salt?

Well, I've learned about salt in a couple of very different places in my life. One was culinary school at Johnson and Wales, and the other was working as a nurse in the operating room. Two very different environments, but both taught me how essential salt really is.

In culinary school, one of the first things you learn is that salt doesn't just make food salty. Used well, you hardly taste it at all. Instead, it brings flavor alive. It draws out sweetness. It balances bitterness. It helps ingredients become what they're meant to be.

A soup without enough salt tastes flat. Add just a little, and suddenly everything wakes up. The vegetables taste brighter. The broth tastes richer. The whole dish makes more sense.

And maybe that's part of our calling.

Despite some opinions, Christians are not meant to dominate the world. Salt doesn't replace the meal. It helps the meal become what it was meant to be. Jesus doesn't say, "Take over the stew." He invites us to be part of it. Salt is mixed in, to be a part of the whole. To draw out goodness already present. To deepen compassion. To temper bitterness. To help hope taste like hope again.

And then there was the operating room, where salt shows up in a completely different way. Saline solution is everywhere in surgery and patient care. We use it to clean wounds, to hydrate patients, to keep tissues healthy, to help the body heal. It sometimes stings, but it prevents infection and supports recovery.

And that, too, feels like part of what Jesus is talking about. Sometimes being salt means bringing healing even when conversations or changes are uncomfortable. Honest truth spoken gently. Justice pursued with compassion. Care that helps life return.

And here's something beautiful. Our bodies themselves are made of salt water. Tears are salty. Sweat is salty. Blood carries salt. Life literally depends on it.

Which means when Jesus says, "You are salt," he's saying, "you are part of what keeps the world alive."

And here in our own lives we see another use for salt every winter. We spread it on sidewalks and roads because *salt melts ice*. It turns something dangerous into something passable. It creates safe footing where we might otherwise slip and fall. So, maybe part of our calling as followers of Christ is exactly that. To help make the way safer for others. To reduce the hazards of fear or loneliness or division. To help people find solid ground again when life feels slippery and uncertain.

So when we think about salty people, maybe we mean people with flavor. Honest people. People willing to stand with each other. Salty folk are rarely boring folk. Salty churches are communities that are alive, not bland.

Jesus also tells us, "*You are the light of the world.*"

Notice he doesn't say we need to try to become light. He says we already are. Which means our work is less about becoming something new and more about letting what is already true about us shine.

Light, like salt, reveals what is already there. Light doesn't create the room. It lets us see what's in it. I wonder, how often has someone's kindness helped you see hope again? How often has this community helped someone see their way through grief or confusion?

And light exposes injustice. Darkness hides things. Light brings truth into the open. Sometimes that kind of revelation is uncomfortable, but healing usually begins with seeing clearly.

And light attracts. A lit window says someone's home. A congregation's life together should shine in a way that says, *you're welcome here*.

All of this brings us back to where we are as a parish. In the coming year we'll be discerning our future, asking questions, listening for God's guidance. But discernment doesn't mean putting life on hold. If anything, it means being even more fully alive right now.

So maybe the deeper question Jesus gives us today is simply this. How salty are we? How bright is our light? Not only in programs or buildings or budgets, *but in how we love one another*. How we welcome newcomers. How we care for people who are struggling. How we show up to melt those icy patches in our world.

When a future priest looks at this congregation, will they see warmth and humor and compassion? Will they taste flavor and life and healing presence? Will they say, "I feel life and light here?"

The beautiful part is that we don't have to manufacture saltiness or invent light. We already carry it. In shared meals. In prayers offered. In laughter and song. In rides given and meals delivered. In patience extended. In showing up when and where it matters in our communities. In all the ways this parish loves people week after week.

Jesus simply says let it shine. Don't hide it. Don't lose your flavor. Because the world needs it.

And maybe that's why when I stumbled across the meme "*Be Salty, Stay Lit*," I laughed because that's how the Gospel gets out there in our culture in ways people may not realize what it is they are proclaiming. But we know!

Howard Thurman once said, "*Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.*"

Atonemates, that's our call for the next eighteen months. Not to sit still or put life on hold. But to be salty. To be alive. To keep bringing that Gospel flavor into the world around us. And to stay lit. To keep shining warmth and welcome and hope so people know grace lives here when they walk into our doors.

And maybe that's what discernment really is. Discovering how God is calling us to come alive together. So when your future pastor walks through these doors next year, they'll find a community already glowing, serving, loving, and fiercely alive.

So, dear people, let's Be Salty and let's Stay Lit.

And that's exactly what Jesus had in mind all along.

Amen.