

“All It Takes Is a Little”

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

Today Jesus asks us to consider what it means to be salt and light.

So, first, let’s talk about salt.

1. Salt is necessary for life, both our individual life and our life together.
It’s part of our makeup. If we have too much or too little salt in our bodies, we get sick.
Salt has been pivotal to civilization.
Salt is mined from the earth and extracted from sea water.
Salt mines going back to 6000 BCE have been discovered in China, Europe and Africa.
Evidence of salt extraction from saline spring water dating back to 6050 BCE
has been discovered in Eastern Europe.
What is thought to be the oldest city in Europe, Solnitsata in Bulgaria,
was built around a salt mine, its name meaning “salt works”.
2. Salt is valuable.
It was prized by the ancient Hebrews, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, and Egyptians.
The scarcity and universal need for salt have led to wars,
and indeed there have been more wars fought over salt than any other commodity.
In some places salt was so valuable it was used as currency –
and indeed our word “salary” is derived from the word “salt”.
3. Salt is a preserver.
Before canning and refrigeration, salt was main way to preserve food –
through methods of salting, brining with coarse salt, and pickling with brine.
4. Salt is an enhancer.
It brings out the flavor in foods.
It lowers the temperature of ice and melts it and raises the temperature of fire and melts metals.

Which leads me to my last point,

5. Salt can kill. Not only can too much salt in our diets lead to hypertension and death,
salt can be used on fields to prevent plants from germinating and coming to life.

Salt is necessary for life, it’s valuable, it’s a preserver, it’s an enhancer, and it can kill,
So what does Jesus mean when he calls us the salt of the earth, and urged us not to lose our saltiness?

Well one thing I discovered was that in Jesus’ day

one of the more common uses for salt was in the smelting process, to make fires hot enough to work with metal.

But what happened to the salt in that process is that it lost its saltiness
and could no longer be used as an enhancer or as a preserver.

The only remaining value that it had was to be thrown out onto the earth to inhibit the growth of plants.

So obviously Jesus is saying that we must not lose our saltiness

because if we do, then all we will be good for is inhibiting and preventing growth and life.

And the corollary of that is that if we look around and we see a lack of growth in life,
then we need to wonder whether we’ve lost our saltiness.

That can be a scary and depressing thought.

But here’s where I find hope.

**It doesn’t take a whole lot of salt to enhance the flavor of food;
it doesn’t take a whole lot of salt to melt the ice on my back porch;
it doesn’t take a whole lot of salt to raise the temperature of the boiling water to cook my pasta.
All it takes is a little!**

Let me say that again just in case you missed it...!

And now, let me have you say it! Turn to your neighbor and say, “It doesn’t take a whole lot of salt!”
Now turn to your other neighbor and say, “All it takes is a little!”

Hold on to that thought about salt while we look at light.

One of the things I love best about my cell phone is its light.

Not only does the screen itself produce a little light in the mist of darkness,
but there's that convenient built-in flashlight that gives even more!

Do you remember the days when we expected weather-related power outages
and we were told to make sure we had candles or flashlights at hand?

Well if you weren't prepared, the most challenging task
was to find that first candle and match or that first flashlight
while you were in total darkness.

Once you found that, you could use it to find more candles or flashlights.

But the key was to have that first small light.

Which is why I love my cell phone - because it's right beside me when I sleep
and all I have to do is tap it and it glows and gives me a little light
and then all I have to do is scroll from the top right corner and click on that flashlight icon,
and I have enough light from that little light on my little cell phone
to find all the light that I need.

It doesn't take a whole lot of light. All it takes is a little.

Let me say that again. It doesn't take a whole lot of light. All it takes is a little.

And now let me have you say it.

Turn to your neighbor and say, "It doesn't take a whole lot of light!"

Now turn to your other neighbor and say, "All it takes is a little!"

And now let me tell you a story about a pastor and her church
who found out that all it takes is a little.

She was a pastor at a mega church, one of the largest in the north east.

The church had thousands of members, getting over 5000 people for Christmas Eve service. I'm not sure how many
pastors were on staff but I think it was like a dozen or more.

And each pastor had their own small group of 20 or so within the church
who would meet together for prayer and Bible study.

The church was hugely successful by any standard of measurement.

Until one day when tragedy struck.

The head pastor's child was killed - I think in an accident at an amusement park.

The pastor and his wife never recovered from their grief.

And other things happened as well and the church began to fall apart.

My pastor friend and her small group of 20 had a vision of Jesus asking them,

"Why do you stay here in the building where everyone has already heard the gospel?

Why are you not out on the streets bringing the gospel to those who have not heard?"

I'm not sure how long it took them to answer the call,

but eventually they heard the Spirit calling them to go & minister in the streets of Newtown. I think they may have
arrived before the mass shooting,

but whether it was before or after, they stayed there and ministered to people on the streets
for several years.

And then they heard the call to come to Bridgeport.

And so a dozen of them came to answer the Spirit's call to do two things:

to build relationships with every pastor and church that they could in the city,

and to take the good news of Jesus Christ to those who were not in the churches.

They worship in a store front in Bridgeport with only about 6-12 people each week,
and if you were to look at them

you might see the most insignificant and unsuccessful church in the city,
but you would be quite wrong.

Because it's that teeny tiny church that God used to start Rise to Read,
its own literacy program working in our city to offer what our failing schools are not.
It's that teeny tiny church through which the Spirit worked to raise up and train and send out dozens of young adults
who are now ministering in other churches and settings.
It's that teeny tiny church through which the Spirit worked
to mount the prayer walk that covered all 1,081 streets in Bridgeport
and the prayer gathering that brought the mayor to his knees.
It's that teeny tiny church through which the Spirit worked to host 2 city-wide Vacation Bible Camps this summer
that brought not only the gospel but reading and math skills to over 300 kids
and ended up launching an entirely new school this year.
It's that teeny tiny church through which the Spirit worked
to include pastors at the table at the mayor's state of the city address
and to gather 75 pastors together for the mayor's first prayer breakfast.
It's that teeny tiny church through which the Spirit worked
to bring the gospel to 22,000 people, including the governor, senator, and mayor,
at CityFest here at Seaside Park this summer.

How did they do that with only 12 members and the \$100,000 those members give each year?
Well, as it turns out, all you need is a little salt and a little light.

Because that's what the Spirit is – salt and light.

The Spirit is what gives you and me life!

The Spirit is our most valuable gift.

The Spirit is what preserves our life, individually and together.

It's what gathered us here and it's what keeps us here because God is not done with us yet!

The Spirit is what enhances our life, individually and together.

It's what turns ordinary life into extraordinary, abundant, exquisite, delectable, magical, mystical, wondrous, amazing
LIFE!

The Spirit is that tiny light that leads us to all the other lights
that will light up our world until it is ablaze with the gifts of the Spirit.

I am so thankful to God for leading me by the Spirit and showing me this teeny tiny church
that God is using to build relationships and change lives.

Because now I know that it doesn't take a huge church to have a huge impact on God's world.

In fact it seems that God does his best work with small, ordinary, common things.

And so now, more than ever, I believe Salem is ready to say yes to the Spirit, yes to Jesus, and yes to God!

It doesn't take a lot; all it takes is a little –

a little hope, a little faith, a little love, a little joy,

and a little salt and light from the Spirit to change the world. Amen!