



**A Sermon preached in Christ Church, Grosse Pointe, Michigan
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**The 5th Sunday after the Epiphany (Year A)
5 February 2023**

In the Name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

A number of years ago a new term popped up in my kid's vocabulary: salty. I love words, so I paid attention to this one. I wanted to make sure that if I started using it I did so correctly: unlike another favorite word of theirs around the same time, shade. With that one, I decided I could accomplish a couple of objectives.

Dave and I loved to annoy "the youngs" by purposefully mis-using their language. It was great to see them bristle whenever I said something along the lines of, "Yeah, she really cast a shadow on him." "Mom! You said it wrong, it's 'throw shade!'" It worked every time. As a middle-aged parent, I felt it was my duty to do this kind of thing when new friends came over for dinner.

Salty, though, I wanted to respect, so I don't use it much. I looked both terms up. Salty originated in the navy. A term for a guy who had been to sea before and had lost all romantic notions of what it meant to go to sea, originating in the 1860's. Shade, in case you are wondering, dates back a little earlier than that to the Jane Austen novel *Mansfield Park*. And I quote, "With such warm feelings and lively spirits it must be difficult to do justice to her affection for Mrs. Crawford, without throwing a shade on the Admiral." Good times.

However, I do not think this what Jesus had in mind when he talked about saltiness. You are the salt of the earth, he told his disciples. But if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored?" We might ask ourselves, how does sodium lose its sodium-ness? It is an element, after all.

Jesus goes on to say, "You are the light of the world." Taken together, salt and light begin to make more sense. We can go a number of directions with this. Salt enhances flavor. On it's own it isn't all that interesting, but alongside something else the flavor of a dish begins to pop. Even sweets taste better with a little salt. Salt causes us to take notice of what is there, like light, salt helps us to see the flavor of food. Salt is a delivery mechanism for flavor.



In the same way, the disciples were men and women who delivered the gospel. Just words, really, until they are animated by the person who speaks them. Like the disciples, our actions, our attitudes, bring out the flavor of the words we speak.

It really is a difficult balance to hit, in this day and age, the proper use of Christian words and actions. Often times we take the safe path and do the good things we know we ought to do without giving any sign that we are living out the gospel. We do the things, but we mute the words. We are salty, sure, but that is about it. People see us, they see our generosity, but they don't see Jesus.

I get it. I am tempted to do the same. So much harm has been done in the name of Jesus that even saying his name can make people feel uncomfortable. We need to acknowledge that when we hear his name a lot of unsavory images float up into our consciousness and put them to bed.

And yet, when Americans are surveyed and asked why they joined a church they say it is because someone invited them. Someone delivered them the message, the invitation, and they said yes. Just a simple, "Hey, would you like to go to church with us sometime?" It works. But, you might be thinking right now, "Sure, it works, for someone else, not for me." So, what are some ways to make it work for you? How can we all become salty and light? So basic, so elemental, so simple. But also, risky, genuine, intimate.

For one, becoming a Christian does not mean you can't be funny anymore. Or go out with friends and get silly. What it does mean is that we examine our humor and our behavior and root out meanness and replace it with kindness. It means we notice our friends' feelings. After the zany conversations on a Friday night, we call them on a Saturday morning. We listen. We show up. We bring them the soup. We do the sink full of dirty dishes.

Ask yourselves, do I have two friends lists? My church friends and my real friends? Two weeks ago, during the Sunday Forum, Fr. Drew and I led a conversation on Spiritual friendship. Do an inventory of your friends and see if you have one who you could develop a spiritual friendship with and be bold. They too might be looking for something deeper in their lives. Something more real than a series of memes just to get through the day.

Paul writes, "When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom." Of course, this is Paul, so we know that the lofty words and wisdom came, as they should also come from us, in time. But first, the lofty words and wisdom are to



be our diet, not a diet force fed to others. For the sake of the world, we study and ponder. We pray, we seek spiritual counsel from those farther along the path.

But in all of this, we know that we are not alone. That people everywhere more than ever, are seeking after truth, wisdom, and grace. They are seeking love. They are seeking their own real salty selves, and your too. We do not have to wait until we have all the answers to the big questions down pat to be our salty selves, to extend Christian hospitality and friendship. We can step out in faith confident that the love of God through Christ sustains us and shines through us. Go ahead, get salty with the world!