

**“Briny & Bright”**  
**Reverend Bill Gause**  
**Overbrook Presbyterian Church**  
**6<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**February 12, 2017**

**First Scripture Reading: Isaiah 58:1-9 (The Message)**

<sup>1-3</sup> “Shout! A full-throated shout! Hold nothing back—a trumpet-blast shout! Tell my people what’s wrong with their lives, face my family Jacob with their sins! They’re busy, busy, busy at worship, and love studying all about me. To all appearances they’re a nation of right-living people—law-abiding, God-honoring. They ask me, ‘What’s the right thing to do?’ and love having me on their side. But they also complain, ‘Why do we fast and you don’t look our way? Why do we humble ourselves and you don’t even notice?’

<sup>3-5</sup> “Well, here’s why: “The bottom line on your ‘fast days’ is profit. You drive your employees much too hard. You fast, but at the same time you bicker and fight. You fast, but you swing a mean fist. The kind of fasting you do won’t get your prayers off the ground. Do you think this is the kind of fast day I’m after: a day to show off humility? To put on a pious long face and parade around solemnly in black? Do you call *that* fasting, a fast day that I, God, would like?

<sup>6-9</sup> “This is the kind of fast day I’m after: to break the chains of injustice, get rid of exploitation in the workplace, free the oppressed, cancel debts. What I’m interested in seeing you do is: sharing your food with the hungry, inviting the homeless poor into your homes, putting clothes on the shivering ill-clad, being available to your own families. Do this and the lights will turn on, and your lives will turn around at once. Your righteousness will pave your way. The God of glory will secure your passage. Then when you pray, God will answer. You’ll call out for help and I’ll say, ‘Here I am.’

**Second Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:13-16 (NRSV)**

<sup>13</sup> “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 underfoot. <sup>14</sup> “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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.



**Sermon: “Briny & Bright”**

In 2002, author Mark Kurlansky wrote a book entitled *Salt: A World History*.<sup>1</sup> In it he describes how salt, so often an afterthought on our dining room tables, is actually one of the most important minerals in the world and that salt has been the cause of more changes in history than almost anything else.

Kurlansky writes that salt is extremely functional. The modern salt industry cites over 14,000, uses for salt “including the manufacturing of pharmaceuticals, the melting of ice from winter roads, fertilizing agricultural fields, making soap, softening water, and dyeing textiles.” You can use it to clean your contact lenses, help make ice cream freeze, put out a grease fire, seal a crack, and if you mix it in water, you can gargle it to help soothe a sore throat.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kurlansky, Mark. *Salt: A World History*. New York: Penguin, 2003. Print.

<sup>2</sup> Kurlansky, 5

What we call salt is actually the chemical compound sodium-chloride. “Chloride is essential for digestion and respiration. Without sodium, which the body cannot manufacture, the body would be unable to transport nutrients or oxygen, transmit nerve impulses, or move muscles, including the heart. An adult human being contains about 250 grams of salt, which would fill three or four salt-shakers, but is constantly losing it through bodily functions. It is essential to replace this lost salt.”<sup>3</sup>

Salt is important for life, but it is also important for commerce. Salt preserves. Kurlansky writes that “until modern times [salt] provided the principle way to preserve food.” Places like Cape Cod in Massachusetts boomed in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries because the local fishing industry (Cod, hence the name Cape Cod) could ship its catch over long distances; a process only made possible by easy access to salt.<sup>4</sup> Salt was integral to military operations for the same reason. If an army travels on its stomach, then the availability of salt to cure meats to feed hungry troops for weeks at a time was a necessity. One of the main strategic targets of Union troops during the civil war were Confederate salt works.<sup>5</sup>

One of those Union targets was Avery Island, Louisiana, which sits atop a massive salt dome. Anyone know why Avery Island is famous today? It is the home of the McIlhenny Company, manufacturer of Tabasco Sauce. Tabasco is made from peppers that have been pickled in salt.<sup>6</sup> There are a number of foods we eat that are made possible by the salt-curing process: sauerkraut, pickles, which are actually pickled cucumbers, ketchup,<sup>7</sup> soy sauce,<sup>8</sup> the pastrami in your sub sandwich<sup>9</sup> and the corned beef on your Reuben.<sup>10</sup>

Salt is important to life and has had a remarkable influence on human history. As Kurlansky notes “Almost no place on earth is without salt. But this was not clear until revealed by modern geology, and so for all of history until the twentieth century, salt was desperately searched for, traded for, and fought over.”<sup>11</sup> World history has largely been shaped by salt.

Plus, it makes almost everything taste better. Pretzels, french fries, and popcorn wouldn’t be worth your time without it.

So, when Jesus says that his disciples are the salt of the earth, he’s saying something powerful. Like salt, the disciples are absolutely critical; what they do and how they live is important to the world around them. Disciples should spice things up; they should help make the lives of those around them better.

But what happens when they don’t? Jesus relates it to if salt all of a sudden wasn’t salty anymore. What happens when salt loses the characteristics that defines it? Then it’s just another rock. Jesus says “If salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything...” Salt with no saltiness is like a glass hammer or a submarine with screen doors: it is essentially useless.

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<sup>3</sup> Kurlansky, 5-6

<sup>4</sup> Kurlansky, 238-240

<sup>5</sup> Kurlansky, 274-275

<sup>6</sup> Kurlansky, 277-280, 436

<sup>7</sup> Kurlansky, 190

<sup>8</sup> Kurlansky, 395-397

<sup>9</sup> Kurlansky, 404

<sup>10</sup> Kurlansky, 124-127

<sup>11</sup> Kurlansky, 12

As disciples of Jesus, we have a purpose, and that is to do the will of God and to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are to love and serve God by loving and serving God's people. If we are not fulfilling that purpose, it's not that we aren't *very good* disciples; if we aren't fulfilling that purpose, we *aren't* disciples *at all*.

But I get it. It's easy to think "not me." I can't do this. I'm not qualified to be a disciple." But consider the people God has used before you:

- Moses led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, but before that he had fled Egypt because he killed a man out of anger.<sup>12</sup>
- Rahab protected Joshua and his spies in Jericho and helped them avoid capture. She was a prostitute.<sup>13</sup>
- Most of the first disciples were fishermen who had no formal training as teachers or pastors.<sup>14</sup>
- Paul was a Pharisee who, before being called by Christ, had persecuted Christians.<sup>15</sup>

And the list goes on. I'm sure there are some really good stories right here in this room of unlikely disciples. People who don't seem like that could be God's first choice are over and over called by God to be disciples; to be salt for the world.

Here is something else to remember about salt: the main components of the stuff you sprinkle so liberally on your popcorn and French fries are an explosive and a poisonous gas.

Sodium Chloride, ordinary table salt, is composed of sodium and chlorine. Sodium is a highly reactive metal that will explode when it comes into contact with water.<sup>16</sup> Chlorine is a poisonous gas that is used in low levels to kill bacteria in swimming pools. It has been used at times as a weapon of war,<sup>17</sup> and is one of the primary ingredients of household bleach.<sup>18</sup>

So you can't imagine being an important part of what God is doing in the world? Well who would have thought a metal that explodes in water and a poisonous gas could combine to form one of the most useful, versatile compounds on the planet?!? You are salt. It is your purpose to be a disciple. It is what we were all intended for.

In addition to being salt, Jesus also says that disciples are "the light of the world." Like salt, light is one of those things that's essential to life. Light is integral to the process of photosynthesis and helps living things grow. Light is a source of energy. We can only see the objects around us because they reflect light. Light makes it possible to see in the dark.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Exodus 2:11-15, NRSV

<sup>13</sup> Joshua 2:1-7, NRSV

<sup>14</sup> Mark 1:16-20, John 21:2-3, NRSV

<sup>15</sup> Philippians 3:4b-6, Galatians 1:13-14, NRSV

<sup>16</sup> "Sodium: Safety and Precautions." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, 04 Feb. 2017. Web. 14 Feb. 2017. <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sodium#Safety\\_and\\_precautions](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sodium#Safety_and_precautions)>.

<sup>17</sup> "Chlorine: World War I." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, 10 Feb. 2017. Web. 14 Feb. 2017. <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chlorine#World\\_War\\_I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chlorine#World_War_I)>.

<sup>18</sup> "Bleach." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, 13 Feb. 2017. Web. 14 Feb. 2017. <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bleach>>.

<sup>19</sup> "Light." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, 26 Jan. 2017. Web. 14 Feb. 2017. <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Light>>.

When I was a kid and I would be afraid of the dark, my dad would tell me, there's nothing there in the dark that wasn't there in the light. "Prove it," I would say. And all the proof I needed was granted in the flip of a switch. I can tell you that even today, when I walk through this Church at night, I know what's there because I've walked this place repeatedly over these last four years. But walking through this building after dark can still be *creepy*.

When there is light, we can see, and when we can see, we are less afraid.

When times are darkest, we need people to be light, to illuminate the things we fear most to show us that they are not so fearsome. When we are lost, we need people to light the path we travel so that we can find our way home. In the dark, we are afraid because we don't know what's there, so our imaginations fill in the blanks. When there is light, we know the truth.

I read a story once about a college professor who was asked by one of his students "What is the meaning of life?"

"Taking his wallet out of his hip pocket, he opened it and brought out a very small, round mirror, about the size of a quarter. 'When I was a small child, during the war,' he said, 'we were very poor and we lived in a remote village. One day, on the road, I this piece of a broken mirror.

"I began to play with it as a toy and became fascinated by the fact that I could reflect light into dark places where the sun would never shine – in deep holes and crevices and dark closets. It became a game for me to get light into the most inaccessible places I could find.

"I kept the little mirror and as I went about my growing up, I would take it out at idle moments and continue the challenge of the game. As I became an adult, I grew to understand that this was not just a child's game but a metaphor for what I might do with my life. I came to understand that I am not the source of the light. But light – truth, understanding, knowledge – is there, and it will only shine in many dark places if I reflect it. This is what I am about. This is the meaning of life."<sup>20</sup>

As disciples, Jesus says that we are the light of the world. It's interesting that in John, Jesus also says this about himself.<sup>21</sup> I believe that we do not make light, but we reflect the light of Jesus into the dark places. That, too, is our purpose. And when we put that light under a cover, we deny that purpose.

I have a friend of mine who runs road races. It just so happens that he is also a Clemson University graduate. A proud one. I noticed on Facebook that this weekend he is running a marathon down in Birmingham, Alabama. Now you may remember that Clemson just beat Alabama in the college football national championship game a couple weeks back. So of course, Alec has been riding through Alabama this week and walking around Birmingham with all of his Clemson gear on. He is letting his Clemson light shine.

And I know people here in Columbus do not have a problem letting their Buckeye light shine. And if you had a sign in your yard this election season, or a sticker on your car or a button on your lapel, then you showed you were willing to let your candidate light shine.

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<sup>20</sup> Rice, Wayne. "The Mirror." *Still More Hot Illustrations for Youth Talks: 100 More Attention-getting Stories, Parables & Anecdotes*. Grand Rapids, MI: Youth Specialties/Zondervan, 1999. 178-79. Print.

<sup>21</sup> John 8:12, NRSV

As Christians, we need to let the light of Jesus shine. As disciples, we are like those small mirrors. We reflect the light of Jesus into the dark places. With our lives, we have to reflect Christ's grace and mercy and steadfast love into the world. That, too, is our purpose.

I know we have a hard time with that sometimes. The world doesn't always respect or reward us for being disciples. There are so many different kinds of people in the world that call themselves Christian. With some we identify, but not others. Many Christians live their faith in a way we may find embarrassing or even offensive. Sometimes it feels better to not define ourselves by our faith so that we don't get associated with some of our Christian brothers and sisters with whom we disagree. But if there are distortions of what it means to be a disciple of Christ; if there are people who give the gospel a bad name, then we do no service to God's work in the world by keeping our own discipleship secret.

So, we need to study, and serve, and share, and act. We need to be courageous, and have faith, and trust God. Because we are salt in a world that needs us to be salty and we are light in a world with too many dark corners.

Be salt. Be light. Let your lives grow briny and bright.

This is our purpose.

To God be all glory, honor, power, and dominion, in this world and in the world that is to come. Amen.