

Matthew 5:13-16
NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION
UPDATED EDITION

¹³ “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 under foot.

¹⁴ “You are the **LIGHT** of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid.

¹⁵ People do not light a lamp and put it under the bushel basket; rather, they put it on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ 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.

Jeremiah 29:1-14
NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION
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¹ These are the words of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the remaining elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. ² This was after King Jeconiah and the queen mother, the court officials, the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the artisans, and the smiths had departed from Jerusalem. ³ The letter was sent by the hand of Elasah son of Shaphan and Gemariah son of Hilkiyah, whom King Zedekiah of Judah sent to Babylon to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. It said: ⁴ Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to

LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

Matthew is one of four gospels – telling the story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth and his teachings. Matthew is the only one of the four to include the larger sermon on the mount (Chapters 5 to 7) with which we’re wrestling this fall.

Today’s section immediately follows the nine beatitudes spoken by Jesus in which disciples are invited to see who we are in the poor, and who we could be in the life of the prophets. Jesus uses the images of salt and light to teach that participation in the kingdom of Heaven, the community of the followers of Jesus mandates an alternative way of life and missional identity that challenge, disrupt, and transform the status quo.

SALT:: is a rich image. “Sirach 39:12 identifies salt as one of “the basic necessities of human life.” It seasons food in Job 6:6. Salt is linked to sacrifice and worship in Leviticus 2:3 and Ezekiel 34:24. Elisha uses it to purify drinking water in 2 Kings 2:19-23. Salt seems to suggest loyalty in Ezra 4:14 and is referred to as “salt of the covenant” in Leviticus 2:13 and Numbers 18:19.

As **SALT OF THE EARTH**, the community of disciples of Jesus, not the ruling elite or the synagogue, is to live this flavoring, purifying, sacrificial way of life committed to the world’s well-being and loyal to God’s purposes.

The **EARTH** belongs to God (Psalm 24:1, Leviticus 25:23) but its inhabitants do not do the divine will (Matthew 6:10) since the devil has usurped authority (Matthew 4:8). This is where the disciples (*WE*) live, in the midst of the poor in spirit, the mourning, the powerless, and the hungry and thirsty, dominated and exploited by the ruling elite (5:3-6). It is where the community embodies God’s empire in merc, purity, peacemaking and persecution as it lives its alternative existence (5:7-12).” – Warren Carter. *Matthew & the Margins*, p. 138.

if salt has lost its taste:: Scholars tell us that this phrase is hard to translate, a more literal a better translation is “*if salt becomes foolish, how can saltiness be restored?*”

LIGHT :: this second image has already been used as the image of Jesus’ mission, spoken of first by the prophet Isaiah who wrote: “the people who sat in darkness have seen a great **LIGHT**, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death **LIGHT** has dawned.” Matthew 4:16. The disciples continue the task given to Israel to be “a **LIGHT** to the nations” (Isaiah 42:6 & 49:6). They are in contrast to Rome whom Cicero described as a “**LIGHT** to the whole world”.

Then Jesus makes a contrast: 1) **LIGHT** on a hill can’t be hidden, naturally attracted the eye. Whereas 2) the **LIGHT** in the house can be covered and hidden. Verse 16 supplies the invitation to action for disciples – us – *let our light shine by how we live*” The others are the world, Jew and Gentile, male and female, powerless and the powerful, the arena and focus of the community’s

all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵ Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. ⁶ Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. ⁷ But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. ⁸ For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let the prophets and the diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to your dreams that you dream, ⁹ for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, says the Lord.

¹⁰ For thus says the Lord: Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. ¹¹ For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. ¹² Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. ¹³ When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, ¹⁴ I will let you find me, says the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & EXAMEN:

- What engaged you, enraged you, or surprised you in these texts?
- Salt and Light are powerful images. Jesus warns that light can be dimmed or hidden, and that saltiness can be overcome by foolishness – by mixing in non-salty stuff. Jesus calls us to be different, to live an alternative lifestyle and identity in our world – living out the Beatitude vision (5:1-12) – how might that change the world?; how might the dominant world change us, keeping us from being “salty”?
- Who has been salt or light for you in your journey, showing and teaching you the Way of Jesus?
- How do you tend to forget or minimize your call to be salt and light? How do you find encouragement, strength or remember that calling?
- The teaching of Jesus is simple and profound. What questions does it leave you with?
- What invitation do you hear the Spirit of God speaking to you – *or to us, as a church* – to act, speak, be, or change, through this word of scripture?

Jeremiah was one of the major prophets of the Hebrew Bible. He was active as a prophet from the thirteenth year of Josiah, king of Judah (626 BC), until after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of Solomon's Temple in 587 BC. This period spanned the reigns of five kings of Judah: Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. Jeremiah prophesied of the fall of the Kingdom, due to the corruption of the kings and the people.

In our selection today, Jeremiah writes to those who have been plundered and taken in captivity to exile in far away Babylon. He tells them to invest in the city where they are; to seek the welfare of the city. It may not be their home, but God will use them there. What the people do and say, how they live is important. It's through them that God is known to all the nations. It's a striking message as one would expect the prophet to tell the people to resist, to not collaborate, to seek freedom.