

Deacon Norah Fisher's Sermon for February 8, 2026
Matthew 5:13-20

I heard a story about a pastor who was on a bit of a tight schedule one day, so on his way from one hospital to another, he stopped off for lunch at a fast-food restaurant, whose name was not mentioned. After he got his meal, he went over to do battle with the paper napkin dispenser. [What mean-minded person invented those things, anyway?] While he was engaged in mortal combat with this stainless steel contraption that parts with napkins as willingly as a mother bear parts with her cubs, and with just about the same amount of shredding and clawing, his concentration was broken by a too-loud voice from behind him.

"You're a preacher, aren't you?" asked the voice. "Does it show that much?" he winced, as he smiled at the kindly-looking woman who made the inquiry, and whom he did not recognize. He wasn't wearing a clerical collar, but the book on his tray may have given her a clue: *The Death of Jesus in the Letters of Paul*. That's different enough from Danielle Steele and Stephen King that the good woman had reason to suspect that only something as odd as ordination would cause one to engage in such lunchtime reading.

"Yes, I am," he said. "Where do you do your preaching?" she asked. For a split second, he wanted to say, "From this big limestone pulpit with an oak reading desk mounted on it." But the Holy Spirit grabbed hold of his tongue and made him give the more straightforward and respectful answer: "At Christ Church on the corner of Main and Cedar." That answer always causes folks to squint their eyes and furrow their brows for a moment, as they access their mental map of the streets of the city, and that expression usually gives way to the exclamation, "Oh, that green stone church across from the high school." "That's us," he said, as he finally extracted approximately two dozen napkins from the vanquished chrome box. He was about to invite the lady to join them for worship when she blurted out, "When y'all gonna have another one o' them big yard sales in y'all's parkin' lot? I really liked that last one y'all had." "When was that?" he asked. He'd been at this church going on 17 years, and there has never been a sale on the lot in that time to his recollection. If his conversation partner was recalling a sale prior to that time with such obvious fondness and glee, it must have been one heck of a sale. "Oh, it was a coupla months back," she said. He tried to suggest that she may have had them

confused with another local church, but to no avail. To her, they were the Church of the Remarkable Rummage Sale.

He invited her to come worship with them, anyway. She smiled and thanked him. He went off to his table -- to eat, to read, and to think of some environmentally responsible use for 23 surplus napkins.

His conversation with the kindly woman disturbed him. Not because she so expertly sniffed out a pastor travelling incognito but because it provided a glimpse, a quick indication, of how some folks view the church: Holy Holder of Mammoth Yard Sales. For others, it might be Organizer of Oyster Roasts, Barbecues, and craft sales For still others, car washes and bake sales might come to mind. And if such things are the operative images of the church in the minds of those outside the church, then we have some considerable amount of work to do if we are faithfully to carry out the mission described in today's Gospel reading. (I'm not saying that we shouldn't have our sales, but that we should not rely on them to bring the community into the church.) Jesus calls his followers, "the salt of the earth," and "the light of the world," and challenges them to season and preserve like salt, to let their light shine to the glory of God.

"Earth" and "world" could hardly be more inclusive terms. It is clear that they refer not to a race or ethnic group, but rather to all those outside the covenant people of God. If the church is the Body of Christ on earth to whom God entrusts the ongoing mission of seasoning and preserving, of enlightening and illumining, then we need something bolder than bake sales, barbecues, craft sales, and rummage sales to bear bright and salty witness to the love of a crucified and risen Christ.

Rather than talk about those bolder ways, I want to share with you some verbal snapshots and to consider what some of those ways actually look like in life. Jesus says his followers are "the salt of the earth."

Consider:

An employee says to a co-worker, "I know we have a lot of work to do on this project, and I can work overtime on it with you. But that particular Wednesday is Ash Wednesday, and I will be at church for about an hour. That's not

negotiable: I simply don't miss that service. I'd be glad to have you join me. We can go back to the office afterwards."

Salt. Jesus says his disciples are "the light of the world."

Consider:

The man who always took an extra lunch to work with him. He worked in a warehouse unloading box cars full of grocery goods, putting the goods on pallets, and stacking the pallets. His wife thought that because of the physical work he was doing, he needed the extra lunch to "keep him going." This went on for many years. Several years later, at his funeral, a gentleman spoke to the man's wife - he thanked her for the lunches that her husband had provided him when he was homeless and living on the streets of Victoria. He told my Mum that my Dad had such faith in him and had helped him overcome addiction, reunite with his family, and get a job. That it was because someone believed that he was worth something and that he was cared about that he was able to do these things.

Light, reflecting and multiplying light. Jesus worries about salt losing its taste.

Consider:

A pastor pays a visit to some folks who have worshipped at the church she serves. In the course of the visit, they share with her part of their spiritual journey. It includes an upbringing in which Sunday morning was a weekly exercise in guilt and humiliation. A lot of shoulds and musts and oughts. A lot of finger pointing and the rhetoric of threats and warnings. Both husband and wife stopped going to church, but sought no other church home, having been told that all others were but tools of the devil. When they did begin to worship elsewhere, the word of grace, of God's unconditional love for the sake of the crucified Christ, found fertile fields in their souls. The wife told of the last church they belonged to, just before their move to this new community. "We studied a book in an adult class," she said. "It was called Jesus Means Freedom. The title of that book just about summed it up for me. I now know the freedom that comes from the love of God in Christ."

Salt: savory, invigorating salt. Jesus says, "Let your light shine before others."

Consider:

In a letter to all his parishes, a Lutheran bishop shares this witness story from the experience of his son's cancer surgery. "The surgery was held on the last

day of the year, and took longer than expected. The doctor, looking in the traditional area for additional evidence of cancer, found none. He decided to look deeper into the abdomen than the procedure called for, and there he found another small tumor, and evidence of its spread to three other lymph nodes, all of which were removed. I shall never forget his response to my question, 'Why did you look there for cancer when it is not part of the normal procedure?'

"The doctor said, 'You will appreciate this, since I know what you do for a living. I was raised by Jesuits, and felt that I wanted to serve God with my life, too. I went to seminary for a year, but after that, I knew that I would have to serve God another way, rather than through the ordained ministry. So, this is what I do. Now, I know that you, and many others, have been praying for your son. I can only report that I felt that I was led by God to look into that part of his body.'"

Light, penetrating light set on a lampstand, illumining all in the household.

The Spirit of the living God is active in our lives and through our lives, to make us salt and light. The Spirit animates the church which is the body of Christ to pursue the mission Jesus entrusted to his disciples: to let their light shine before others, the earth, the world -- those within and without the family of faith. Bake sales, barbecues, craft sales, and rummage sales are necessary for fellowship but they do little to increase the illumination of that light or the tastiness of that salt. But when a worker makes time for worship; when someone is led to say and know and feel that they are cared about; when a surgeon bears a humble witness to the Spirit's inexplicable guidance, the seasoning quality of the salt is preserved, and the light burns brighter.

My question to you is "How will you preserve the salt in your life so that your light shines brighter?" AMEN