

Last week we heard a wonderful children's sermon from Lois Pederson about being the light of Christ to others. She shared a quote from a famous college football coach about letting the light inside of us shine brighter than the light that shines on us. We sang that favorite song of many of us about letting our light shine.

Her children's message has prepared us for this week's gospel lesson that we are about to read. We are about to read the passage that the song "This Little Light of Mine" is based on. It is found in Matthew 5.

We are in the midst of a long series where we are looking at many of the parables that Jesus told. Parables are stories that Jesus told that use everyday images to convey deeper messages. Today we will hear about salt and light.

This passage that we are reading comes from what is commonly called the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5-7 is the Sermon on the Mount and it is called that because Jesus ascends the side of a large hill to deliver a sermon to a large crowd that is gathered around him. Matthew records Jesus beginning this sermon with the Beatitudes which is the list of who Jesus says are blessed. Blessed are the poor, those who mourn, the meek, the merciful and pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those who are persecuted for doing what is right.

Matthew then records Jesus saying this.

Read Matthew 5:13-16

What does it mean to be salt and light in the world? Salt, of course, brings flavor. It also may bring high blood pressure but I don't think that is what Jesus had in mind. Salt is about taking something rather ordinary and adding something to it to make it something a little bit more.

Light, of course, does not draw attention to itself. Light is not about being seen. Light is about helping something else to be seen as it really is. We are called, according to Jesus, to make whatever and whomever better off around us. We are called, according to Jesus, to help something else to be seen as it really is.

So what does this look like? What does it look like to be salt and to be light in the world? I want to share two examples. After worship if you join us in the gym or in the class that meets in the parlor you can share other ways that you may see light and salt in the world.

The first example of salt and light in the world that I share comes from Madrid, Spain. Let me read to you from this article:

“On a frigid winter night, a man wearing two coats shuffles into a brightly lit brick restaurant in downtown Madrid. Staff greet him warmly; he's been here many times. The maître d' stamps his ID card, and the hungry man selects a table with a red tablecloth, under a big brass chandelier.

The man, Luis Gallardo, is homeless — and so are all the diners, every night, at the city's Robin Hood restaurant. Its mission is to charge the rich and feed the poor. Paying customers at breakfast and lunch foot the bill for the restaurant to serve dinner to homeless people, free of charge.

It's become Spain's most sought-after lunch reservation. The restaurant has poached staff from luxury hotels. Celebrity chefs are lining up to cook once a week. For paying clients, the lunch is fully booked through the end of March.

The restaurant opened in early December, and is run by an 80-year-old Catholic priest, Ángel García Rodríguez, whom everyone knows simply as "Padre Ángel." Or “Father Angel.”

"I want them to eat with the same dignity as any other customer," Father Ángel says. "And the same quality, with glasses made of crystal, not plastic, and in an atmosphere of friendship and conversation."

Opening up a restaurant that charges nothing does not seem like a viable business opportunity. But Father Angel began with a vision of being salt and light to the community around him. And God has blessed his salt and light. Can you imagine the ministry opportunities that he has laid a foundation for in his restaurant? I can think of endless opportunities where people who would never darken a door of a church can be a part of ministry opportunities that spread the good news of God's love.

I can think of endless possibilities where people who are facing difficult times and are living on the streets are given hope and welcome and respect. Maybe I should not give a plug for a local restaurant but if you visited Patty O Grill in Clover on Christmas Day you would have experienced the same hospitality from owner Patty Imler and her staff to folks who were invited to eat in her restaurant on Christmas Day but not charged for the food.

What does it mean to be salt and light in the world? I invite you to hear the story of Mary Johnson-Roy and Ed Roy.

"You may remember Mary Johnson from a [2011 StoryCorps conversation](#) with a man that could have easily been her enemy.

She spoke with Oshea Israel, the man who murdered her son, Laramiun Byrd. Mary met Oshea while he was serving time in prison for the crime. After his release, they became close and sparked a remarkable relationship.

"My natural son is no longer here. I didn't see him graduate. Now, you're going to college," she said to Oshea back then. "I'll have the opportunity to see you graduate. I didn't see him get married. Hopefully, one day, I'll be able to experience that with you."

"Just to hear you say those things and to be in my life in the manner that which you are, is my motivation," Oshea said. "You still believe in me. And the fact that you can do it, despite how much pain I caused you, it's amazing."

Since that interview she has been telling her story in local churches. She also fell in love and in 2015, married a man named Ed Roy. He had served time in prison, and later, also lost a son, Mandel.

"We met when my first born and my one and only son was murdered," Ed tells Mary in a recent StoryCorps conversation. "And a couple of my daughters had asked me to go to the church to hear you speak."

He says he wasn't ready to forgive, but he was at a loss.

"Like I shared with you, I thought God took my boy and was punishing me for my own crimes. I had joined the gangs early and pulled my first armed robbery at 11 years old. With you being there, I saw hope. You took me under your wing. That's why I called you my angel," he says.

Just before they got married, Ed says he had a dream.

"Your son was saying, 'Yeah, Mom! Alright!' You know, 'Right on!' And my son was saying, 'Yeah, Dad! 'Bout time you got it right!' Ed says.

Oshea served as a groomsman at their wedding. "He is my spiritual son," Mary says.

The anniversary of Laramiun's murder is Feb. 12.

"That empty hole's always going to be there in our hearts," Ed says. "But I feel like when we together and we able to listen to one another's heartbeats. It says a lot."

"I'm thankful, I really am," Mary says. "You're a good man."

Maybe you don't feel called to open up a restaurant to feed the hungry and maybe you are not called to forgive a person that murdered your child or parent. But you are called, by God in Christ, to be salt and light. So what does that look like for you?

Being salt and light is going to be different things for different people. But we can leave worship today with a commitment to bring something positive and life giving to the most ordinary and plain of situations. In a bad job situation? Do something to improve the life of a co-worker. In a bad marriage situation? Do something to improve the life of someone in a similar situation.

In a bad situation with a friend? Do something that is positive and life giving for that person whether they appreciate it or not. Frustrated by something in the world around you? Do something positive that seeks to live out Micah's words about doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God.

We can come up with lots of excuses for our life's situations. Our life is too plain or our life has no meaning. We can say that the world is against us for whatever reason. We can complain about the world around us and do nothing.

Or we can listen to Jesus who tells us to be salt and light to the world around us.

To add something positive and to shed light on what is true. AMEN.

[-http://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2017/01/24/511267616/spains-robin-hood-restaurant-charges-the-rich-and-feeds-the-poor](http://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2017/01/24/511267616/spains-robin-hood-restaurant-charges-the-rich-and-feeds-the-poor)

[-http://www.npr.org/2017/01/27/511823122/in-marriage-a-bond-of-love-loss-and-light](http://www.npr.org/2017/01/27/511823122/in-marriage-a-bond-of-love-loss-and-light)

-Given: January 29, 2017 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)