

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

February 8, 2026



SALT

metaphor in an age of heart disease

by Drew Downs

From as long as I can remember, salt was treated as something to limit. To moderate. Heart health, blood pressure, and all those connected concerns — they are always associated with a need to reduce sodium intake. I've had to learn that the word "season" in the cooking world means to salt the dish. That salt unlocks flavor. And that salt, remember, is the original preservative. It is why jerky is so salty and also a way to keep meat safe to eat unrefrigerated.

This all makes the metaphor of disciples as the salt of the earth such a strange one. Stranger when Jesus goes into salt losing its saltiness. It makes it sound like a threat — that we could become empty husks, useless.

It is not an existential metaphor, but one describing relationship, flavor, *joie de vivre*! Who are we to our neighbors? Do we enhance the world? Make it more livable? Just? Hopeful? Loving? Make it a yes!

AFTER EPIPHANY

2026

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

Getting Salty

As our lectionary continues to push us to see the dignity in our neighbors, to note the way others are treated, to love them with the same fuel and intensity we offer our own survival, then doubling down on the character of Jesus's followers — that they (and each us) is uniquely suited (and dare I say obligated?) to participate in that active loving, that compassion and support for others? Oof! So what does that actually look like?

A lot like the work we do in our neighborhood and wider community. Caring for those experiencing food insecurity and homelessness and advocating for their greater care and support. It is also the wrestling we do individually, with the care of the people who walk through our doors or drive through the alley to receive food from Manna from Seven.

It can mean supporting one another when we speak up for the welfare of others. Because that can be scary work. Or working with others to create a common voice, as our bishop did with 153 of her colleagues as they wrote a joint letter of hope. (Here's a video: https://youtu.be/XAMPRZViBns?si=bYOS_QLqzIV6EOyr)

And it can mean just showing up. Showing up *with faith*. With joy and love and a compassionate heart. To be willing to expand the circle. That our stories, our future, the kin-dom starts now. With us. At our annual meeting. In church. Wherever two or three are gathered as followers, dreamers, co-creators of a new world, a people reborn. Faith restored. Community rebuilt. And love ruling all.

With love,
Drew+

AFTER EPIPHANY

2026

FOR SUNDAY

Epiphany 5A

February 8, 2026

Collect

Set us free, O God, from the bondage of our sins, and give us the liberty of that abundant life which you have made known to us in your Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Reading

Matthew 5:13-20

Jesus said, "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.

"You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. 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. 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.

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

AFTER EPIPHANY

Reflection

Salt and saltiness, light and lamp, the Law and least. Remember that these words come immediately after the Beatitudes to begin the Sermon on the Mount, which we read last week. That collection of blessings which highlight a sensitive disposition to one's neighbors, of growing sense of responsibility to them, and the need to sometimes stand up to protect them from abuse, to receive abuse ourselves. This colors how we ought to read these words. About conviction and call, about participation in the kingdom here. And not wasting what has been given to us. Like we have been entrusted with the keys to the Kin-dom and maybe we ought to take that seriously.

I am very conscious of how often we are tempted (or encouraged) to read the gospel in this segmented fashion and turn these teachings into universalisms about all people throughout time, the order of things in a general, predictable world. This approach might lead us to binary conclusions about types of people — the ones we declare are good or bad — as a permanent, descriptive state, rather than a narrative one, full of action and consequence. Context has a way of peeling away this false binary, though, which is essential for a passage like this one, which might compel us to consider in absolute terms rather than relative. Terms that are relative to the persecutors of the meek children of God are those going to war against their own people.

Jesus speaks to being salt and light in tasteless and dark times. That this is our responsibility as children of God — to serve and love and share the grace of God — because there are others who are defying this work and teaching others to be selfish, to hate, and to condemn. And Jesus says that this is the bar his followers must clear. It is a ridiculously low bar, folks. We can do it. As long as make the heart of Christ the heart of our work, we're going to clear it. But those are the terms. And it means there are a bunch of people claiming to do the Lord's work who aren't clearing the bar. And most of those people are the ones making it harder for those who are.

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