“Taste and See” – Contagious Faith #4

November 1, 2026 First Christian Church

Scripture Text: Matthew 5: 13-16

Four of you have that de’ja vu look on your face that says, “Didn’t we just have this Scripture lesson?” To you I say, impressive, yes we did. October 18, just 2 weeks ago. Nice catch. Then we were talking about people being made up of three parts: body, mind and spirit; and how we as the church have the gift of spiritual development and how we need to let it shine in order for others to find wholeness. Otherwise they are walking around as only 2/3 of a person. Today we added one verse to the beginning to see how the verses work together – not just light, but salt and light – you are salt of the earth and the light of the world.

We begin with salt. You remember from other sermons that salt was extremely valuable in ancient times. Salt is the only mineral that we human beings take directly from the earth and eat. The first roads were built in order to transport salt. Thereby, salt was the first thing ever taxed. In the time before refrigeration, salt was a preservative as well as a spice and a disinfectant. Recently salt has come under fire for those who have a heart condition, but our bodies still need salt. My dad was recently in the hospital for 4 days because a medication interaction depleted the salt levels in his body. But in our reading, Jesus focuses not on salt’s preserving or disinfecting characteristics, but its flavor as a spice or seasoning. Verse 13, “if salt has lost its taste… it is no longer good for anything.”

Though I am a big fan of food, I am not a cook or a chef or a baker or even a person who has developed a fine pallet. I like food, but I don’t know the science or the techniques for getting it to taste good. But from what I understand, salt is foundational in that process. It not only has a distictive taste of its own, it actually brings out the taste of the food and the other spices. 70% of our salt intake comes from what we add, but food that has already been processed for us – like canned vegetables, lunch meats, and prepared dinners. Eating out increases our salt levels even more. They know how to use it well to make their stuff taste good.

When Jesus calls us “the salt of earth”, He is talking about what our faith adds to life. It not only has a flavor of its own that makes all of life better, it brings out the flavors of other parts of life. Loving relationships are even more loving when we add Jesus to them. Nature is even more beautiful when we recognize the creator in it. And when we live out our faith by loving our neighbor as ourselves, by caring for the least of these in our midst, and by lifting up a high moral standard that pleases God; we make life better. Not just taste better, but actually make it better. Living out our faith in solid, practical ways gets the salt out of the sharker and not only brings a good flavor of its own, but brings out the amazing natural flavors of everything we touch.

For many, that is what the church is all about – adding flavor to our lives and making us better. In his book "The Purpose Driven Church", Rich Warren tells of a survey done by Win Arn, a leading church consultant. Arn surveyed members of nearly a thousand congregations asking the question, "Why does the church exist?" The results? Of the church members surveyed, 89 percent said, "The church's purpose is to take care of my family's and my needs." For many, the role of the pastor is simply to keep the sheep who are already in the "pen" happy and not lose to many of them. I get that. In John 13, Jesus says, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." How does Jesus say you will know His disciples? From how they love one another. How they are salt for one another.

But is that what the church is really about – taking care of "my family's and my needs"? The next line in our Scripture is "You are the light of the world" which is not to be hidden under a bushel basket. A light is about shining so others can see. A light helps identify danger and show the safe path. A light is attractive, and when used well, is all about showing the way. In the church's case, showing the way to abundant life here on earth, and eternal life with God in heaven. The 11% of the people who didn't say, "The church's purpose is to take care of my family's and my needs" said, "The purpose of the church is to win the world for Jesus Christ." They too are right.

Karl Singer, a leader in the financial services industry, puts it this way. "Any business that wants to succeed over the long haul must do two things really well. First, give great service to its present customers; and second, constantly acquire new customers." The same is true of churches. We need great customer service (salt of the earth) and be constantly acquiring new customers (light of the world). Of course the congregation knows that acquiring new customers is the preacher's job because the preacher has the knowledge and training to bring people to Jesus. At the same time the preacher knows acquiring new customers is the congregation's job because he or she doesn't work or socialize with anybody who isn't already a part of the church. But Jesus uses the term "you". "You are the salt of the earth" who spices up and brings out the beauty in every person and moment you touch. "You are the light of the world" who is constantly acquiring new customers to win the world for Christ. "You". When speaking to the preachers, Jesus says, "You are salt and light." When speaking to the people in the pews, Jesus says, "You are salt and light."

And it is hard to hear, because even after 4-5 weeks of studying "Contagious Faith", we still struggle with the stereotypes. On the one hand, we think winning souls for Jesus is the activity of superstar Christians who are really good at it. Either that or for the really pushy, out of touch individuals who impose themselves and their understanding of the gospel on everyone they meet. And the problem with that is I know just about everyone in this congregation, and I don't

know anyone who fits either of those two categories. So either we say First Christian Church has had a good 145 year run and it was nice while it lasted, or we free ourselves from the shackles of those stereotypes. It has been fun to hear you share your growing edges. Instead of just saying, “Oh, I can’t meet Tuesday, how about Thursday.” You now say, “Oh, I am at church on Tuesday, can we meet Thursday.” To hear you leaving your “Contagious Faith” book out where someone could see it and ask what you are reading. I am really enjoying hearing about the group that is meeting in Jarrety’s and how being together is giving them courage to share in that place – sometimes intentionally raising their voices so those around them can hear. We have growing edges, but we are not there yet.

Being the salt and the light is not the job of super Christians or obnoxious Christians. Jesus says, “You are the salt of the earth… You are the light of the world.” Whether you build relationships or serve selflessly to get the salt out of the shaker, or tell your story and answer questions to get the bushel basket off your light, or prefer boldly speaking truth where truth needs to be told; Jesus says it is you. Whether you are the preacher, the Sunday School teacher, the elder, the deacon, the choir member, the pew tapper, the pew sitter or the Facebook connector; Jesus says you are to get that salt out of the shaker to where it can do some good, and get that bushel basket off your light and let others see the path to abundant life here on earth and eternal life with God.

Because you were meant for more. More than just going to school. More than finding a meaningful career. More than the possibility of getting married, having a family, or someday settling down and retiring. Yes, and even more than finding God’s forgiveness, going to church and serving others – great as those are, you are meant for more. To not only know God, but to make God known. You are meant to be a gift. To positively touch and affect others’ lives, even their eternity.

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