

A first thing to say about Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount is that the "you" he uses is plural. He means "you all." In English I can say "You are the salt of the earth" and you don't know if I mean Charles is the salt – or "you-all" are the salt.

English doesn't clue us in like in Greek and Aramaic where "you" and "you all" are different words. The word here is "you all." When Jesus says, "You are salt." the image is more like a saltshaker – a lot of salt shaking out together.

My mom collected saltshakers. Anyone else collect them? I've put a few over on the little table. I challenge you all to try shaking out just one speck of salt. The first one who can show me how to do that gets these yummy low-salt chips. Try after worship today. One speck.

A saltshaker isn't a bad visual for what Jesus has in mind when he says, "You all are the salt of the earth." You, collectively, are a saltshaker meant for sprinkling the world to bring out it's best – to flavor it up.

I like how *The Message* version of Matthew 5 puts it: "*Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth.*" That's quite a purpose.

Some of you must have made homemade ice cream the old-fashioned way. Remember what you put around the outside of the container? Rock salt. It helps the ice melt better and freeze the cream.

Salt is also thrown on icy roads so they're not so slippery. Salt preserves food. To some of us, salt just tastes good – especially pink Himalayan salts, or salted chocolate, though too much salt is a problem. Reduced salt diets are common. But for Jesus, salt was a valued commodity.

Years ago, people were paid with salt, like pastors paid with chickens. Salt was useful, as chickens are – for eggs, chicken soup and pot pies...

The paper money we use today is given value by our government – otherwise it's just green paper. When Jesus spoke of salt, his hearers would have assumed something of worth.

And Jesus is speaking of identity. He didn't say, "Try to be salt. You should be salt. Why aren't you salt?" Jesus said, "You all are the salt of the earth."

Jesus came to help us be who we already are by God's design. Jesus came that we might have life, abundantly. Being salt is having life.

We're created to join with others in bringing out the good in the world. "Let me tell you why you're here," says Eugene Peterson. "You're here to bring out the God-flavors." And Jesus doesn't leave it there. He takes a second stab at helping us hear our purpose, adding the metaphor – light.

Researchers say if any size candle is lit and placed along an open road in the dark most of us could drive a mile and ½ away and if unobstructed, we could still see the flickering light.

Light shines in the darkness. Jesus sent his first disciples to places that needed light shed on them, allowing hurtful things to be seen. Hurtful things don't get changed until the hurt is seen. Injustices stay as they are until insight is shed that opens eyes.

I've enjoyed a story about a biker who wheeled himself around the Bahamas. He was fascinated with lighthouses and rode out to each of them. When he came to the largest lighthouse, he was invited to walk the winding steps up to the light where he was surprised by what he saw.

The source of huge light he'd seen at a distance was actually quite small. The lighthouse keeper explained that a small light was positioned so mirrors could reflect its light far beyond its own capacity. Its strength came from its reflection. The reflected light was seen over 25 miles away.

You and I may not feel like our little lives can make much difference. But Jesus sees us differently. As Jesus said of salt, he also says of light. "You are the light of the world."

"You all" "are" light. Light is what we're made of. We can hide under bushel baskets if we wish, but hiding only deprives God from doing through us what we've been sent here to do.

Steve Garness-Holmes puts it this way:

You may think your efforts small and meaningless.

You may think they make no difference.

But go out and look up at the stars.

Which one should never have bothered to be?

*They all shine until they are swept up
in the great light of the One who dawns among us.*

None of them rids the night of its darkness.

*Yet God walks out and looks at them all
and smiles.*

Picture God walking out and smiling at you and at LCM as lighthouses or saltshakers in the hands of God – here for our moment in time and space.

Scientists tell us we're made up of starlight. Our molecules come from the stars of light years away. God imbues us with our moment to shine.

A song I recently discovered was written by a woman in her 60s who died a year ago of a brain tumor. Susan was her name. Seven of her songs are in the ELW and eight newer ones are in *All Creation Sings*. Her life has now been swept up in the great light of the One who dawns among us, but her little light still shines through her words:

Cast aside all fear and hiding; God is with us, Christ, abiding.

Thus, does glory shine at midnight: open hearts invite the starlight.

You-all “are” salt. You-all “are” light. Be who you are and trust God, the great Reflector, smiles on you.

Amen.

+Pastor Peg LCM, LA