

**A Sermon for the 5th Sunday after Epiphany
February 8, 2026**



Come to New Life!

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[Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany – The Episcopal Church](#)

Matthew 5:13—20

Saltiness

Jesus is on a mountain, preaching his famous Sermon on the Mount. Last week the assigned Gospel reading was the Beatitudes – we didn't hear it because we celebrated the Presentation instead – but the beautiful familiar words of the Beatitudes continue to resound in our memories nonetheless. My favorite, for this time in our lives, is "Blessed are the peacemakers."

But there is more to Jesus' sermon than those 12 verses. We pick up the reading this week at verse 13, where Jesus uses two important metaphors, first salt, then light. Since we are in the season of Epiphany, the concept of Light, in all its ramifications, really stands out for us. Hear the famous phrase, "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid." The Puritans in the 17th century took this phrase very seriously. The Massachusetts Bay Colony thought of themselves as a light to the whole world, and they even set up a part of Boston they called Beacon Hill. That idea still resonates with Americans, who for a long time in our history, thought of themselves as a light-filled message to the whole world. The Puritan message is still a part of our national identity.

So, we all know about light. I chose today to speak about the other metaphor, namely saltiness. Think about salt for a minute. We use the word salt in many of our expressions: Don't rub salt in our wounds! My, you use salty language!

We have derivations of the word "salt" in many ideas and expressions. For example, words that begin with the letters S-A-L, say, for instance SALERY. Originally, Roman soldiers were paid in salt, a precious commodity, hence the word. And that salty language I referred to might be called SALACIOUS.

I would like to think about salt in another way, namely as a seasoning. A little bit of salt in a recipe can make all the difference to its taste. Without salt, the soup would be very bland. But perk it up with a little salt, and it is a whole new taste experience! I remember hearing our former Bishop Mark Hollingsworth preach on this passage many years ago. We clergy were at a clergy day conference that happened to be on October 15, the feast day of Saint Teresa of Avila. This passage was the Gospel reading for her day, and Bishop Mark took off with the metaphor as it applied to this salty saint. Just a quick sketch: Teresa was a mystic nun who lived in Spain in the 16th century. Placed in a Carmelite convent by her family when she was a teenager, she found the experience rather boring. She wanted more intensity! So she founded about 17 more convents, all of the intense "discalced" persuasion, heavy on the asceticism. She had many mystical experiences, and she wrote about them, notably in a book entitled "The Interior Castle." She also wrote her autobiography and wrote volumes to her daughter nuns. Teresa was a phenomenon, and Bishop Mark praised her irrepressible spirit, saying her saltiness kept her going.

I think of saltiness as a wake-up call. All through Advent we were reminded to wake up, be alert, for we do not know when the Lord will come! We might get wake-up calls about our relationships, with people, and with God. We might get a jolt about a different path or meaning in our lives. We were told to be ready for anything!

Our Epiphany metaphors might likewise tell us to perk up and be ready, to be alert and expectant. A little salt can open us to new flavors and tastes. Let us be ready for anything!

What do you think? Do we need a little more salt in our parish? Do we need to perk up the flavor of our activities and reach out further with the Good News? We can be ready for more saltiness on levels, from spicing up our personal spirituality, to our parish endeavors in this new year. Let's have a salty adventure!