

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera QLD
8th February 2026 – Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

Matthew 5:13-16

SALT, LIGHT & LOVE

Maybe your perception is different to mine, but it seems to me that one of the first questions young children learn to ask, and the one they like to ask most often, is ‘Why?’. Looking back on my own children, grandchildren, and others I have known, they seem to go through a stage when they ask this question so much that it starts off as cute, and then you wonder and admire how much they are growing in their cognitive knowledge and understanding of the world, but then it can move on to being frustrating and even annoying: ‘It’s time for bed now’. ‘But why?’ ‘Otherwise, you’ll be tired in the morning’. ‘But why?’ ‘Because then you will be grumpy’. ‘But why?’ ‘Because I will get angry with you, now go to bed!’ But really, we know that it is great that from a young age they do begin to enquire like that, because in knowing why things are done, we are able to both do them willingly and continue to look for better ways to do them.

Last week we looked at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes, and I suggested that in that description of the life of a disciple Jesus answered a question some people were possibly asking; ‘But what does it look like?’ The reading we have here today moves on straight after that one, and we could look at it that Jesus has answered the ‘what?’, and now He is addressing the ‘why?’ Why do we live as God’s people in the world? Why are we called to show God’s love to the world? Why does God want everyone to know about and live in His love? Because through God, Jesus says, you *are* the salt, you *are* the light, you *are* the people God works through so that everyone can have these life changing things in their lives too.

If the Beatitudes are about Jesus explaining what it looks like in our lives to be a follower of Him, a disciple, this short and well-known reading is talking about our identity as God’s people and why that is important. As He does so often in His teaching Jesus uses two images here, salt and light, which people back then would have been able to relate to very well. Firstly, He says,

‘You are the salt for everyone on earth’. What does salt do? It preserves, it savours, it transforms. Salt has long been important for people, going back over 8,000 years some suggest it was a major form of currency used in trade. For us today, we probably mostly associate it with taste; like those times when you cook a dish and then after you taste it you think, ‘I forgot to add the salt!’ We use salt because it brings out the good flavours, which is in itself a good application of what Jesus is teaching here. But for people back then, before electricity and fridges and freezers, salt was very important in preserving food, especially meat. It was so important that Roman soldiers were often paid in salt. So, when Jesus tells people they are ‘salt for everyone on earth’, their minds would have gone not only to bringing out the good taste of life, but also the role they were called to play in helping to preserve a good life for all.

And light, we looked at that just a couple of weeks ago, and we know it is an image of God’s love and presence in the world which is often used. What does light do? It illuminates. It brings safety and security. It shines light on wrongdoing so it can be exposed and stopped. Light both protects us and shows us the way to go. Again, it is an image that both those who first heard these words and us hearing them today can relate to. And what does Jesus say here? ‘You are the light for the whole world’. We, as God’s people, showing all those attitudes and actions of discipleship that Jesus has said at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, we are now the ones God has put here to be both the light and the salt in the world.

If then, after Jesus’ opening words here, anyone listening to then or reading since His words was to ask, ‘But why?’, Jesus now gives a very straight answer: because you are the salt for everyone on earth, you are the light for the whole world. The ‘why?’ is about our identity, about who we are. Jesus doesn’t say, ‘try to be the light’, or, ‘one day you may become the salt’. He says, simply, ‘you are the salt, you are the light’. When we think again then about what we know about salt and light, how does this come out in and through us? How, like salt, do we preserve, transform, enhance, change? How, like light, can God through us illuminate, protect, guide, even

expose? It is a very straight forward and simple image used, but is it so straight forward and simple for us to do?

What Jesus is talking about here with both of these images, and what He said in our reading last week, is about bringing God's love into the world. It's not about judging, or condemning, or putting ourselves above others, although too often in times past and still today as Christians we do try to witness to God's love like that. It's also not about earning's God's forgiveness or favour, but we do these things as a fruit, a result, a response, of the love, grace and forgiveness we already receive from God. Although it wasn't what I was first thinking of when I first started typing commands into my computer to create our image for this week, I've ended up liking the background for this theme because it looks a bit like an old-fashioned advertisement. I don't know why, but it reminds me of the kinds of ads we used to see on the screen in the interval at the drive in theatre. One way to look at what Jesus is saying here, is that we are advertisements for God, we show people what God's love is like, we show them the difference He makes in our lives. The saying goes that Christians are often the only Bible a person will ever read. In being God's salt and light in the world, we bring and show His love to the world.

Let's take a step back from the 'why?' question, and go back to 'what does that look like?' What does it look like to be the salt of the earth, the light of the world, and for us to bring God's love into the world? How do we do this in a way that helps people to see God's love, not judgment, and also, this can be tricky, in a way that draws attention to God and not to us? In your everyday life, how can you enhance and preserve the relationships which are around you; your family, your friends, workplace, your church family? How can you, just by the way you live, the things you say, how you treat others, how can you show that God's love does make a difference to you in your life? How can you be salt to change those things which need changing? How can you be light to expose those things which need to be exposed? In all of this, how can you show that it's all about God's love for us in Jesus that our lives are renewed, and that there is now light in our darkness? Perhaps you have answers for that straight away, maybe it's something you want to think about a

bit more. None of us are ever going to get it completely right. If you find it a bit hard or daunting, break it down: think of yourself as being God's advertisement to those around you, not for your sake, but for His. Think about what Jesus did for you in dying and rising again so you can have new life and live in His light. Ask God to help you to remember and consciously live out this new life out each day.

To be God's salt and light in the world is to show His love out in a way that everyone can see and know it. There is more that can be gone into with that, but that's a good level to start on. You might not hear this very often, but go out and be salty; allow God's love coming through you to preserve and enhance the lives of others. Let the light of God's love, the light of the cross, shine through you so that all can live in the love, hope, peace and joy which only God can bring to us. By God's grace, allow God to work in and through us to preserve and illuminate our lives, and so others can come to know Him too. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- Can you think of any children who often asked the question 'why?'. Or is there another question you have had children asking a lot?
- 'You are the salt for everyone on earth'. What do you think of when you hear these words? How do you think Jesus is calling you to think, speak, and act? What are you doing, could you be doing, to be the salt which preserves and enhances in our world?
- 'You are the light for the whole world.' What do you think of when you hear these words? How do you think Jesus is calling you think, speak, and act? What are you doing, could you be doing, to be the light which protects, guides, and exposes in our world?
- How do you feel about being called an advertisement of God's love in the world? In what ways or areas of your life do you struggle with this? If there are things you would like to change so you can better show God's love to the world, but struggle with that, bring them to God in prayer.

Pray: thank God for making us who we are, His people, His salt and light in the world. Ask Him to help and guide us so we can be effective witnesses to others.

*Pastor Andrew R. Koehler
08.02.2026*