

## Isaiah 58

Shout loudly; don't hold back;

raise your voice like a trumpet!

Announce to my people their crime,  
to the house of Jacob their sins.

2 They seek me day after day,  
desiring knowledge of my ways  
like a nation that acted righteously,  
that didn't abandon their God.

They ask me for righteous judgments,  
wanting to be close to God.

3 "Why do we fast and you don't see;  
why afflict ourselves and you don't notice?"

Yet on your fast day you do whatever you want,  
and oppress all your workers.

4 You quarrel and brawl, and then you fast;  
you hit each other violently with your fists.

You shouldn't fast as you are doing today  
if you want to make your voice heard on high.

5 Is this the kind of fast I choose,  
a day of self-affliction,  
of bending one's head like a reed  
and of lying down in mourning clothing and ashes?  
Is this what you call a fast,  
a day acceptable to the Lord?

6 Isn't this the fast I choose:  
releasing wicked restraints, untying the ropes of a yoke,  
setting free the mistreated,  
and breaking every yoke?

7 Isn't it sharing your bread with the hungry  
and bringing the homeless poor into your house,  
covering the naked when you see them,  
and not hiding from your own family?

8 Then your light will break out like the dawn,  
and you will be healed quickly.

Your own righteousness will walk before you,  
and the Lord's glory will be your rear guard.

9 Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;  
you will cry for help, and God will say, "I'm here."

If you remove the yoke from among you,  
the finger-pointing, the wicked speech;

10 if you open your heart to the hungry,  
and provide abundantly for those who are afflicted,

your light will shine in the darkness,  
and your gloom will be like the noon.  
11 The Lord will guide you continually  
and provide for you, even in parched places.  
He will rescue your bones.  
You will be like a watered garden,  
like a spring of water that won't run dry.  
12 They will rebuild ancient ruins on your account;  
the foundations of generations past you will restore.  
You will be called Mender of Broken Walls,  
Restorer of Livable Streets.

### **Psalm 112**

Praise the Lord!  
Those who honor the Lord,  
who adore God's commandments, are truly happy!  
2 Their descendants will be strong throughout the land.  
The offspring of those who do right will be blessed;  
3 wealth and riches will be in their houses.  
Their righteousness stands forever.  
4 They shine in the dark for others who do right.  
They are merciful, compassionate, and righteous.  
5 Those who lend generously are good people—  
as are those who conduct their affairs with justice.  
6 Yes, these sorts of people will never be shaken;  
the righteous will be remembered forever!  
7 They won't be frightened at bad news.  
Their hearts are steady, trusting in the Lord.  
8 Their hearts are firm; they aren't afraid.  
In the end, they will witness their enemies' defeat.  
9 They give freely to those in need.  
Their righteousness stands forever.  
Their strength increases gloriously.

### **1 Corinthians 2**

When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I didn't come preaching God's secrets to you like I was an expert in speech or wisdom. 2 I had made up my mind not to think about anything while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and to preach him as crucified. 3 I stood in front of you with weakness, fear, and a lot of shaking. 4 My message and my preaching weren't presented with convincing wise words but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power. 5 I did this so that your faith might not depend on the wisdom of people but on the power of God.

6 What we say is wisdom to people who are mature. It isn't a wisdom that comes from the

present day or from today's leaders who are being reduced to nothing. 7 We talk about God's wisdom, which has been hidden as a secret. God determined this wisdom in advance, before time began, for our glory. 8 It is a wisdom that none of the present-day rulers have understood, because if they did understand it, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory! 9 But this is precisely what is written: God has prepared things for those who love him that no eye has seen, or ear has heard, or that haven't crossed the mind of any human being.[a] 10 God has revealed these things to us through the Spirit. The Spirit searches everything, including the depths of God. 11 Who knows a person's depths except their own spirit that lives in them? In the same way, no one has known the depths of God except God's Spirit. 12 We haven't received the world's spirit but God's Spirit so that we can know the things given to us by God.

### **Matthew 5**

13 "You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its saltiness, how will it become salty again? It's good for nothing except to be thrown away and trampled under people's feet. 14 You are the light of the world. A city on top of a hill can't be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they put it on top of a lampstand, and it shines on all who are in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before people, so they can see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven.

17 "Don't even begin to think that I have come to do away with the Law and the Prophets. I haven't come to do away with them but to fulfill them. 18 I say to you very seriously that as long as heaven and earth exist, neither the smallest letter nor even the smallest stroke of a pen will be erased from the Law until everything there becomes a reality. 19 Therefore, whoever ignores one of the least of these commands and teaches others to do the same will be called the lowest in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever keeps these commands and teaches people to keep them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 I say to you that unless your righteousness is greater than the righteousness of the legal experts and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

## **Sermon**

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.

When I was 19, I was diagnosed with low blood pressure and low blood sugar. Now, the blood sugar thing was no fun, because it meant every time I ate carbohydrates, my body went into overdrive making insulin to break down the breads and pastas into simple sugars. I'd have a short sugar high and then a powerful crash. That's when I started taking what we call spaghetti naps. That one was no fun. The low blood pressure, though, seemed like a dream, because the prescribed medicine was doubling my salt intake every day. While the rest of the world was cutting back salt and buying low sodium everything, I got to add salt to deli meats and canned soups and all those things that already seem chock full of sodium.

Now, other than keeping me from passing out, salt serves a number of other purposes purposes, culinary and otherwise. It's a

preservative, which is how things like salted pork and salted fish became common fare for ships making long voyages. Salt helps to keep things edible without the benefits of refrigeration or synthetic preservatives.. Relatedly, salt's a disinfectant. It helps to kill infections. That's the pain that you feel when you've got a cut on your arm when you swim in the ocean and why your cuts heal more quickly. Salt sucks up the moisture of the microscopic organisms, which incidentally is why too much salt in the soil prevents plant growth. Much more frequently in our lives, though, salt is used as a seasoning. Even how it seasons is interesting, because in limited amounts, you don't just taste the salt itself, but the salt opens your tastebuds to the flavors of other flavors in the food.

So when Jesus tells us that we are to be the salt of the earth, we've got a good legacy to follow. A legacy of preserving. A legacy of disinfecting. A legacy of enhancing. But if salt loses its saltiness, what's the point? Much academic ink has been spilled over this

teaching because it's not actually possible for sodium chloride to exist and for it to lose those properties. But, as one theologian mused, Jesus is "not teaching chemistry." Instead, that's the point entirely. How absurd of a world would it be for salt to lose its saltiness! It's unimaginable. Jesus is pointing out that, for salt to lose its saltiness is roughly the equivalent of leaving the real world to live in the circus hall of mirrors, where what we see - and taste - doesn't reflect reality.

In a similar way, the church is meant to flavor the world with the taste of eternity. But if we offer a bland taste or tepid experience to the world, then what exactly are we good for? If the church loses its identity as the active Body of Christ in the world, then are we even the church? If we're bland as the church, then we serve no Kingdom bound purpose. We're like salt without saltiness if we're not unmistakably on the side of God's loving justice.

Many of us have a tendency to look toward the ills of society, the sins of selfishness to which so many have become accustomed, and we place the blame on something in society. We blame capitalism. We blame media marketing strategies. We blame greed. We racism, sexism, heteronormativity, patriarchy. I use these examples intentionally because, well, these are the things that I tend to blame. And surely they bear a portion of the responsibility.

But perhaps the selfish turn of society suggests that we've become a bland church, that we've foregone our responsibility as the salt of the earth. We're no longer preserving the good that the world has to offer. We're no longer disinfecting the wounds that fester in the putrid flesh of our world. We no longer open the tastebuds of the earth so that the good flavors, the God-given identities, can make the most impact. We've lost our saltiness, and the world's suffered.

Now, what's important to note here is that I'm not questioning our salvation. We're not called to work for our own salvation, for we know that's been accomplished in Christ. But while our salvation is secured, the salvation of the world is at risk. A bland church offers not taste of God's goodness, so how would people come to know that the lord is good? Without the salt of our lives preserving, disinfecting, and flavoring the world, why would anyone think that Jesus is better god than money, or sex, or power, or the military, or industry, or entertainment, or whatever voice it is that we listen to more than the voice of God? Why would anyone taste and see that the lord is good if the people of the lord are bland, devoid of the Lord's goodness?

How, then, can we live the flavor of God in our lives? There are a number of ways, literally a lifetime full of ways that we can live this salt life. But let's think about an example of each of these properties.



If salt is a disinfectant, and we're to be the salt of the earth, then we must confront the "isms" of prejudice when we encounter them. Last week, Graham helpfully suggested that one way we activate our Christian identity is to speak up when we encounter racism, whether in the workplace, at home, or in social media. The same is true for homophobia and transphobia, religious stereotyping of muslims, for instance, and the dangerous ways that patriarchy threaten the lives and livelihoods of women. Our silence in the face of these injustices is a salt without saltiness, a worthless representation of an impotent church.

If salt is a preservative, and we're to be the salt of the earth, then we must double down on our commitment to marginalized communities. We emphasize the integrity of people of all abilities through Across the Spectrum. We're now learning to organize a larger community around issues of justice through SolSup. We pass on the faith and raise up new leaders through Highlander

Lutherans. This kind of work preserves the integrity of the church. It reminds us that our identity comes not by our choices, but by God's willingness to become human, to suffer death, and to rise again, that we might have more than the limited lives we can imagine, that we might instead of the fullness of abundant life found in God's very presence. That's what we preserve if we work as the salt of the earth.

If salt is a seasoning, and we're called to be the salt of the earth, then we're meant to reveal the differences between God and the world. Remember, the right amount of salt helps you notice not just the salt, but the flavors of other foods. In the same way, we're called to offer a distinct flavor of life that also highlights the differences found in other communities. For instance, there may be political policies on the right and the left that align with parts of God's mission, but certainly not all. God is no Democrat. God is no Republican. There may be areas of the American identity that align

with God's vision for creating, but certainly not all. God is no American. If we too quickly identify God with our political party or national origin, we ignore the deep, abiding goodness that God's got to offer. The only way people will know the difference and come to embrace the salt of the earth is if the salt of God's kingdom is sufficiently distinct from all the other idols who try to rule our world. If the church doesn't taste any different than a social club, doesn't disinfect any better than a political party, or doesn't preserve the good more faithfully than a school, then what reason do people have to come here?

Fortunately, Jesus does not leave us alone in this. Jesus provides the paradigm for this life, giving us the example in his life and empowering us through God's Spirit. We need not do this on our own. Instead, we join in with the work of God that saved us, so that other people might know just how enticing, how delectable, how vital it is to find life abundant in God's abundance.

You are the salt of the earth. It's time for us to give reason to  
taste and see that the Lord is good. Amen.