

February 5, 2023\*  
 You are the Essential Ingredient  
 Matthew 5: 13  
 The Rt. Rev. Dr. Bonnie A. Perry

May the God who creates us....

Good Morning.

Jesus says, "You are the salt of the earth."

Na CL—Sodium Chloride.

Salt.

Salt: historically a substance so valuable that it served as a currency, influenced the establishment of trade routes, [the development of cities,] it provoked and financed wars, secured empires and inspired revolutions—thus says historian Mark Kurlansky in his book Salt: A World History.

Salt. Jesus says, "You are the salt of the earth."

Michael Ruhlman, a writer and Culinary Institute of America trained chef says, "Salt is a fundamental ingredient in understanding the history of civilization precisely because it enabled us to preserve food, thousands of years before refrigeration and transportation made food so accessible. It allowed food to travel long distances...Salt was [at one time] more valuable than precious metals; men were paid with it. Salt: the only rock we eat." (*Ruhleman's Twenty* p 18.)

Ruhlman, in his really cool, technical yet accessible cookbook, *Ruhleman's Twenty*, offers 20 key cooking techniques placed in his perceived order of importance for creating amazing dishes. The second entry in the book, right after the piece entitled "Think," is the chapter called, "Salt: Your most important tool." For him, learning to salt food is the most important thing a cook can do. (P 18)

"Working properly with salt is what makes a cook," says Ruhleman.

"You are the salt of the earth," says Jesus.

The heart healthy gang, over at the American Heart Association, might have wanted Jesus to use a different image, but processed food, and the possible resulting high blood pressure was much less of an issue in those days...

But let's go back to what Jesus might have been thinking.

"You are the salt of the earth." He says this in his inaugural address. He has just finished calling his disciples. He has healed some people and done a bit of road-side

preaching. Now, after climbing the mountain, he sits down, and he is laying out his blueprint for our world to come.

He says,  
 Happy are, blessed are  
 the people who are hopeless  
     because the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.  
 Blessed are people who grieve,  
     because they will be made glad.  
 Blessed are people who are humble  
     because they will inherit the earth.  
 Blessed are people who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
     because they will be fed until they are full.  
 Blessed are people who show mercy,  
     because they will receive mercy.  
 Blessed are people who have pure hearts  
     because they will see God.  
 Blessed are people who make Peace  
     because they will be called God's children.

He lays out his view of how the world might be and then he says to everyone on that hill and to us, here and now:

Blessed are you.  
 You are the salt of the earth.  
 The essence, the rock, the mineral  
 that matters more than most anything in this world of ours,  
 you are the salt of the earth.

You are the essential ingredient to embody this hope, for a new way of being.

You. You. You.

You are called,  
 you matter,  
 you are made in God's image and likeness.  
 You, beautiful you.  
 Your essence is ultimately what is needed to change this world.  
 To no longer accept this world as it is.  
 You, you and you are needed.

Here is the point, hear the point:  
 God created you, you, you, look in the mirror you are needed to add flavor and hope  
 to this soup of our world, this stew of creation.

Do you have any idea how essential and amazing you are?

God does.

Jesus calls us now, as we are, to be the key element and primary ingredient to bring hope to the world.

You are the Salt of the Earth.

But if you, if we fail to recognize our essentialness, our primacy to God's hope for our world—then what?

Theologian Jurgen Moltman says that the death of the church and I would say of the world is when we succumb to cynicism. Our death, the death of our spirit, happens when we give into cynicism and just accept whatever is—regardless of the consequences.

We will have lost our saltiness, when we passively accept the death of Tyre Nichols, another African-American man, killed by police officers, in the course of a traffic stop. What does it say, that the police officers who beat Mr. Nichols to death were also African-American? From the video of Mr. Nichol's beating, independent analysis shows that 71 commands were given in 13 minutes, "*A barrage of commands that were confusing, conflicting and even impossible to obey,*" (New York Times Analysis Feb 1, 2023). I think it says that our society has created a system that allows police officers to physically punish civilians for a perceived disrespect and to escalate physical force at will, even when there is no weapon.

Our saltiness will be trampled underfoot, like Mr. Nichol's body, if we accept that this incident and hundreds and hundreds that continue to happen are accepted without us saying as people of faith how can we stop this insanity?

We will have lost our saltiness, when we say in word and deed, this is just the way things are so we might as well just get used to it.

The Beatitudes, call us to envision something more, to see something more, to long for something more, to work for something more.

This work and vision begins when we realize every morning as we rise that we are the essential ingredient. We are the ones, the people of faith, we are Salt of the earth, called to use our unique gifts, our positions in society, our power as a community of faith to be that mineral in the soup, the seasoning in the sauce, that changes everything.

Jesus calls us to be the salt of the world, to alter the bleak, to ward off the bacteria of decay, and instead be the foundation of God's hope for our world.

We are the Salt of the earth, the essential ingredient to move our families, our communities, our world to places of healing and hope.

You—you are the salt of the earth. The essential ingredient God needs to change it all.

Sodium Chloride—the salt of the earth—You are, I am, we are the salt of the Earth. So says Jesus Christ.

Amen.