

Epiphany 5, Year A

- It's good to see you all again, and I apologize that I wasn't able to bring warm weather back from vacation with me
- For those of you who don't know, I spent the past couple weeks attending a conference in Atlanta, visiting family in Savannah, and then taking my two sons on their first ever trip to Disney World
- We had a fantastic time, and created enough memories to last a lifetime, but I'd like to share just one of them with you now
- The boys were amazed and thrilled at a great many things at Disney World, but among their favorites was something I would have thought they'd enjoy, but was surprised by just how much
- And that is the Mickey shaped pretzels that they sell in the parks
- The boys had a few of them while we were there, and they enjoyed every bit of them as my wife Loren or I pushed them around the park in the stroller
- And like so many soft pretzels, they were sprinkled with salt – you know, the enormous crystals of it
- So well-sprinkled, in fact, that for a while after they enjoyed a pretzel, sometime hours, sometimes even a day later, there were still salt crystals lingering in the stroller, no matter how much we tried to get rid of them
- And when Elias would discover these salt crystals, he would almost inevitably eat them – we'd be pushing the stroller and all of a sudden hear him, just munching on some salt
- No matter how long it'd been sitting around the stroller in the sun and the wind and the elements, it was still salty enough to satisfy the delightfully strange tastes of my son
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- Which got me thinking, of course, about this quote from Jesus:
- “You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.”
- How frequently, in your experience, does salt lose its taste? How often have you tried to use salt and found it to be unsalty?
- I'd venture a guess that some of you have salt in your pantries or cupboards that has been there as long as some of us have been alive and yet still seems perfectly usable, perfectly salty
- It turns out there's a reason for that, and that's because the chemical compound we call

salt – sodium chloride – is extremely stable – not a lot messes with it

- So when Jesus talks about salt losing its taste, losing its saltiness – it seems he’s talking about something quite rare indeed
- You don’t always hear people talk about this – in fact, commentaries are littered with explanations about how the salt used at the time must have been wildly impure, and so must have behaved differently
- And that may well be true, I won’t claim to be an ancient near eastern salt expert
- But I think it’s also possible that he’s at least hinting at something else, as well
- Something that the next analogy makes a little clearer, I think, where Jesus says, “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.”
- I’m not an expert on ancient near eastern bushel baskets, either – but even the ones we have today aren’t airtight – aren’t the type of thing you’d want to use if you absolutely had to hide a source of light, say, so that no one could see it
- The light still peeks out, through the gaps in the slats or the weaving of the reeds
- Attempting to hide your light under a bushel basket doesn’t merely defeat the point of the light – it’s also foolish and doomed to failure because it doesn’t actually get rid of or hide the light
- The light is still exactly what it is – still does exactly what it does, just not nearly as well
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- I think in talking about his followers as salt and light – in talking about us as salt and light – Jesus wants us to realize something important
- We who are in God, who are followers of Christ, worry an awful lot sometimes about our lives, about our lives in Christ, about the way we live out our faith
- We worry that maybe we’ve fallen away from God – that we’ve let our light go out or we’ve lost our saltiness
- But that isn’t how salt works, and it isn’t how light works
- We can try to hide it, try to mute it or mask it, try to dilute our saltiness with all kinds of other flavors or hide our light by covering it up
- But I think Jesus is telling us this morning, “That. Doesn’t. Work.”
- Christ resides in us from the moment of our Baptism – and all of our attempts to minimize that fact or to run away from God are every bit as self-defeating, every bit as doomed to

failure, as trying to make salt less salty

- As trying to hide a light under a basket
- In our life in the faith, we worry about this a lot, but I think Jesus wants us to know:
- We do not need to regain our saltiness; it never went anywhere
- We do not need to rekindle our lights; they are already lit
- We just have to remember who we are
- Because Christ lives in us, we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world