



“You” are...

1 Corinthians 2:1-12; Psalm 112:1-9; Matthew 5:13-20
Reverend Giuseppe Mattei (February 5, 2023)

The five most common flavors detected by humans are salty, sweet, bitter, sour, and umami. While every flavor may not appeal to us, most of us are drawn to at least a couple of flavor profiles. Salt is particularly interesting because it is a naturally occurring element that helps our bodies do the daily work of living. Salt does multiple jobs, but when it comes to food, the main work is preserving food and enhancing flavor.

Can salt really lose saltiness? Probably not and, contrary to Jesus’ opinion, in icing conditions, it is good to throw it down on the ground and walk on it. In fact, salt is great for melting snow and for walking safely on a path or driving a car without sliding off the road. Water in Florida is hard. I use salt for softening my water.

In Jesus’ day, salt was very important and used for many things. Besides being used to flavor food, it was also used to preserve food, to cleanse, to heal, and as currency, or trade. (The word salary comes from the Latin word *salarium*, the root word of which is *sal.*: "an allowance, a stipend, a pension," said to be originally "salt-money, a soldier's allowance for the purchase of salt.")

But most of all, salt is essential to our health.

Salt is made up of a number of chemical compounds, but what makes it salty, what makes it useful, is sodium chloride, which is very stable and will keep its usefulness for years. But if salt is exposed to water, or diluted, the sodium chloride can be dissolved and removed, and the salt will lose its essence, or saltiness. It still looks like salt, but it’s no longer useful.

We, too, can look the same on the outside, but if we let our faith become weak and diluted, we ourselves become watered down, tasteless, meaningless. and flat. We’ll lose our usefulness in the kingdom of God.

Galatians 6:9 advises, “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” I think this is what Jesus is referring to when he spoke of the salt losing its saltiness. Weariness or the cares of the world can definitely damp our connection with our Creator and distract us from what gives us sense and motivation: our core being and image of God.¹

A faith life means to maintain and sharpen our connection to God, the Source of Life and Ground of our Being. We may lead a life without religion but we cannot lead a life without faith. Faith is trust in a higher power, beyond ourselves. That higher power better be God. But we know all too

¹ See Matthew 13:22; Mark 4:18-19; Luke 21:34-35; Romans 12:1-2

well that other things may take God's place in our life. The kind of higher power we trust will determine the kind of relationship we have with others and ourselves.

It is our restored and maintained connection with God that allows our divine image to find expression: Creating new things and new possibilities; doing good; choosing righteousness; loving the people who persecute us; forgiving folks who repeatedly try to do us harm.

God gave to Isaiah very clear directives on what to say to the people of Israel: They were performing ritual acts of piety but not really worshipping Yahweh. They were fasting, offering sacrifices, raising their prayers for wisdom and guidance while at the same time being rebellious to God's ordinances, abusing their power, pretending to seek God, and exploiting their workers.

The people seemed to be clueless as to how their worship of Yahweh did not match their daily living. They were giving God lip service while at the same time planning how to scam God's people. Their heart was not in their worship, and their worship did not shape their habits.

So, Yahweh clarified what to worship God means: "to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free," to feed the hungry, to shelter the homeless, to clothe the naked, and "not to hide yourself from your own kin." (see Isaiah 58:6-7)

This is what the Hebrew Scriptures teach us: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. 7 Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise." (Deuteronomy 6:4-7)

True worship is not confined to what we do in church. True worship is the acknowledgment of God and all God's power and glory in everything we do. The highest form of praise and worship we can offer God is faithful obedience to God's Word and humble service to God's people. This will catch people's notice and may inspire them to praise the heavenly Father.

When we face difficulties, suffering, and injuries it is easy to become weary, but we must not stop obeying the Word of God; we cannot stop living by the Message of Jesus. Unless we're walking in Him we will revert right back to walking in our flesh, to living for the world and for ourselves, and in that state we cannot be useful in spiritual things.

"So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ." (Colossians 2:6-8)

Jesus is the one saying: "*You* are salt...*You* are light..." He is saying those things to the people who heard him speak the Beatitudes a few moments earlier. If they were not shocked then, they are now. He is talking to everyday folks. He is talking to you and me.

Jesus and not I is saying I am salt, I am light. I wouldn't dare. Who do I think I am? I know myself all too well to say that I am not salt or light. I am a poor sinner. I cannot pretend to be salt and light. How could I? How arrogant of me that would be? And yet...

Should I distrust what Jesus thinks of me? Should I doubt his words? If I am ready to bet my life on his words, do I trust all of them, the “You are salt/light” included? Maybe I think negative thoughts of myself. Harsh thoughts. I tend to believe them. I tend to act (or not) on them. But who am I to judge...even myself. Jesus thinks otherwise.

Jesus is the one trusting me. He is the one who knows me better than myself, and calls me forth, calls me to trust myself, to step up, step out, and step in.

If I do not know and trust myself enough and think of myself less, not wanting to attract attention or become a nuisance, my salt will be tasteless and my light dim. If I overcompensate and become overconfident (too much salt and too bright of a light) then I am doing things and going to others with a self-centered and arrogant attitude, a hidden agenda that will be refused by people and deemed invasive, pushy.

A right relationship with myself, a correct understanding, a confident and appreciative trust of what Jesus says of me will put me in the right relationship with the world.

I’m not necessarily called to do great things. It’s enough they are “good works.” If I think of myself poorly, I will trust poorly, and will do poorly. I will think of myself as not worthy, not equipped, not talented and incapable of serving. I might use that assessment of myself not to step out of my comfort zone, not to stretch beyond my limited imagination. Others will be denied the possibility of seeing good works and praise God.

If I think too much of myself and force my way with people masquerading my self-serving “evangelistic” intentions as altruistic, people will run away, calling me out. My overly zealous self-confidence requires higher expectations of me and comes across as a demand to people, whether it’s expressed with honey (the promise of heaven) or with a stick (the fear of burning in hell). That will not bring praise to God either.

Jesus simply wants us to become aware of our inner power² generated from us being children of the heavenly Father, created in the image (the light part) and likeness (the salt) of God. Jesus, the perfect image of the Father³ clearly states in John’s gospel: “I am the Light of the world.”⁴ When we follow him, we improve the visibility (light) of the *image* and become more *like* (salt) him.

So, the important and salvific thing is not to be admirers of Christ but followers.⁵ We don’t want to lift Christ up too much and use that as an excuse not to be like him. That would be “christolatry” in the words of Dorothee Soelle. She, in fact, writes: “The goal of the Christian religion is not the idealizing of Christ, not christolatry, but that we all are ‘in Christ,’ as the mystical expression goes, that we all have a part in the life of Christ.”⁶

Followers obey his Word and let it dwell in them to the point of being found “in Christ”.⁷

Let us pray the Lord, our God, to be merciful with us and allow us to take in his words and believe in them: “You are light of the world. You are salt of the earth.” Amen.

² Philippians 4:13; 1 Peter 5:10

³ Hebrews 1:3; John 14:9; Colossians 1:15

⁴ John 1:1-5; John 12:35-36

⁵ <https://www.plough.com/en/topics/culture/holidays/easter-readings/followers-not-admirers>

⁶ Dorothee Soelle, *Theology for Skeptics: Reflections on God*, p. 92

⁷ Galatians 2:20; Romans 6:11; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:10;