

Salt of the Earth

By Josette Keelor

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You are the salt of the earth.

You are the light of the world.

In other words, you matter.

Salt doesn't just spice things up. It flavors dull foods and, more importantly to someone living 2,000 years ago, it preserves foods that otherwise would have spoiled.

In the case of the Dead Sea, where the ratio of salt to the water is very close, salt has a buoyant effect—it lifts anyone who enters its waters, and its minerals are prized for their healing and rejuvenating effects.

In today's reading, Matthew tells us we're salt.

To liken ourselves to salt is to proclaim that we add flavor to the lives of those we touch. It's to acknowledge our ability to preserve—or to save—others from corruption and death.

In other words, what we do matters.

That's not the same as having control over others. Any 12-step program will tell you we actually have zero control over what others do. It's an idea that's at the heart of the Serenity Prayer.

*Lord, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference.*

We cannot change what others do—but we can change ourselves and how we react to what others do.

That might be a little confusing, because how can we be salt—something that flavors and preserves—if we can't reliably affect change in others?

Well, I think the answer is in the second part of Matthew's Gospel reading: You are the light of the world.

In preparing today's sermon, I recalled a hymn I grew up singing in the Catholic Church:

You are the light of the world:

*May your light shine before all,
that they may see the good that you do
and give glory to God.*

So, no, we can't make choices for others, but we can lead by example and illuminate the path to righteousness through our actions and our reactions.

A friend posted a question on Facebook this week asking for examples of how she might help make the world a better place. It was a sincere and desperate request, and she received dozens of responses, though I was sad to see how politically motivated so many of the responses were:

- Calling state representatives
- Protesting policies
- Joining focus groups

Sure, these are all ways of taking action and are important for anyone feeling like they need to exercise their First Amendment rights.

But I'm not sure that's what my friend was asking.

What about smiling at a stranger, holding a door for someone overloaded with groceries, or calling up a friend who's having a tough time?

I saw a great commercial the other day that starts with a little girl who finds a note in her lunchbox from her mom saying "You're amazing." She then leaves the note for a classmate, who brightens when he sees it; and he in turn, passes it on. This note makes its way through the school, cheering up people who are having a tough time or just need a reason to smile—this one note, which might never have been if the girl's mother hadn't decided to pack it in her lunch that morning. And it results in 10 or 20 more people finding joy from its simple message: You're amazing.

Making the world a better place doesn't happen overnight. It starts with a single decision. It can be a big, sweeping gesture—or it can be the little things that go unnoticed to everyone except the person who gives and the person who receives. And if the receiver then becomes the giver, that's how we make the world better.

So I put it to you: How will you be someone's salt this week? How might you be someone's light?

How will you make the world a better place?

It doesn't take much—just a smile here and an open door there. Just something that shows that every one of us matters. You matter to all the people out there that you might touch—for good or for bad.

Let's make sure what we do is for the good. Let's show people that they matter too.