

What does it look like for your salt to remain salty and your light to shine?

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

February 8, 2026

In all of our commitment and dedication and devotion to God and to our spiritual lives and to our church, we will always find others who are more committed and dedicated and passionate than we are. It's true of many Muslims who fast during the month of Ramadan and pray five times a day. It was true of the ancient nation of Israel during the time of the Old Testament prophets. In the book of Isaiah, we heard God speaking highly of the Jewish people for their daily desire to know all that God required of them. They asked God for just decrees and wanted to be near to God. They fasted and humbled themselves. Yes, they were a people who were living in close alignment with God and with God's ways – or, maybe they weren't.

It seems that things were not quite right for those Jewish people. They were frustrated in their religious and spiritual lives. It seemed that God had not been responding to their petitions and fasts and their pious acts of humility. Those ancient people believed that they were doing everything just right; all that God expected of them, and all that their Jewish religion required of them.

But something still seemed to be not quite right between them and their God. It turns out that despite their pious religious upbringing that had faithfully prepared them to live in harmony with God and with their fellow religious Jews, they apparently had a significant, and crucial, blind spot. This same blind spot was on Jesus' radar that day five hundred years later when

he addressed his disciples. He warned them: “You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.” Both Jesus, and Isaiah, were saying that the children of God were in danger of their saltiness losing its flavor; of the light of their good deeds being snuffed out; of their fasts becoming ineffectual. There were certain vital behaviors that God expected of his children that they were neglecting. And yet, they were not the only ones who were neglecting these vital behaviors; who had a potential blind spot. We are in danger of it as well.

In Isaiah, God had not been satisfied with the people’s religious and spiritual devotion. Oh, they faithfully went without food on all the required fast days. And yet God told them that going without food was not the kind of fast God required. God said: “Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to clothe them...If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. The Lord will guide you continually and satisfy your needs in parched places and make your bones strong.” God spoke

through Isaiah, telling the people that they were neglecting certain crucial kinds of “fasts.” And because of this, their religious fasts meant little; they were ineffectual.

Jesus, five hundred years later, added two other metaphors to that of fasting to speak of the Jewish people’s ineffectual devotion. He said: “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? ... You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. People do not light a lamp and put it under the bushel basket; rather, they put it on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.” Jesus was warning his disciples, that they were meant to be the salt of the earth. And they must remain salty. They were the light of the world. And they must not hide their light, but raise it up for all to see.

So, how do we perform the right kinds of fasts? How do we make sure our salt remains salty and our light shines forth for all to see? In Isaiah God said, this is the kind of fast, the kind of devotion I require of you; to remove the oppressive yoke of injustice that weighs people down, to set the oppressed free, to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked, and to stop speaking evil of others.

The religious and civil system in Israel worked well for many of the people, but it was oppressive for others who were the unseen in society; the vulnerable; those who were struggling to just eke out a living as they lived on the fringes of society, or were outright rejected and left destitute; people like widows and orphans and those with skin imperfections or skin

and blood diseases; the foreigners, the tax collectors, the prostitutes. This oppressive religious and civic system was spoken of by Isaiah and by Jesus. One day Jesus rebuked the religious leaders by saying: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others.”

How do we make sure that our salt remains salty and that our light shines; how do we go about removing the oppressive yokes of injustice that weigh people down and shackle them, how do we set the oppressed free, feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked, and to stop speaking evil of others. How do we go about this divine work? We accomplish it through love. Love is the key. Love is the catalyst for salt; love ignites the light.

Love is the force that keeps our salt salty and our light shining brightly. So, the question is not about how salty we are or how brightly our light shines, but about how loving we are. How do you and I continue to become more loving individuals? The poet and prophet Rumi gave us the answer. He said this: “Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.” Let me quote him again: “Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.” Don’t try in your own willpower to be saltier or shine more brightly; don’t try harder to do good works. Focus instead on seeking out the barriers within yourselves that you have built against love, which will then enable love to flow more freely within you and from you.

I am so thankful for our Good Shepherd community, and all the many ways we are growing in love and removing barriers to love. I saw it clearly this past week as our vestry gathered at DaySpring for our annual vestry retreat. While we were there, the love of God flowed freely within us and among us. I am so thankful for the many ways Good Shepherd allows love to flow and helps remove the oppressive yokes of injustice that weighs people down, setting the oppressed free, feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked with socks and undies, and speaking in loving and not evil ways to others.

May our salt always remain salty and our light shine!