

“You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world.” (Matthew 5:13.14)

Have you tried ‘Salt & Shake’ crisps, the ones with the little blue packets of salt which you open and sprinkle into the packet? Which do you prefer – crisps with or without salt? How much salt do you add? We all know that salt enhances flavour.

In today’s Gospel Jesus describes two metaphorical identities, salt and light. These are two fundamentally important ingredients in human life and Jesus emphasises the importance of our life as Christians to be both of them.

In the Old Testament, salt was an accompaniment to all Temple sacrifices and also served the vital function of preserving food from decay. Losing its taste is perhaps more than just the inability to bring out flavour, but also about preventing the efficacy of the sacrifices that maintained Israel’s relationship with God. Alongside this is the risk of that the food it preserves will decay.

The importance of salt for health was also understood in the ancient world and we now recognise its importance for blood pressure, muscle function and activation of digestive enzymes. We cannot make salt in our bodies and so we rely on external sources for what we need.

Perhaps Jesus means that our role as salt brings people into relationship with God, just as in the Jewish sacrifices of the time, while at the same time bringing health and preservation. But, alongside these things, we should not forget its ability to bring out flavour. As the salt of the earth, we bring out the flavour in life. We not only enable health, but also enable others to taste life itself as God intended, enjoying the riot of colour and variety that God has provided.

The second identity that Jesus gives us is to be the light of the world. This could seem an even bigger responsibility. After all, Jesus himself is called the light of the world elsewhere. Can we really stand alongside him, with an integrity that provides a light so bright that all who see it will glorify God? Jesus thinks we can, and instructs us not to hide our light.

In the Old Testament, God speaks and brings the light into being, and it is this light that makes life possible, bursting out of the chaos and darkness. Can we be this kind of light too? Can we be life-enabling for all of those around us?

Combining these two identities and living them out is a powerful idea. Together they allow us to facilitate relationship and bring health and the ability to taste all that God has created, while illuminating it all and pointing towards God.

I think that as Jesus speaks to us of our call to be salt and light, he is saying, “It is not about me, but about you. It is about what you, my followers, *are* and what you will *do*. I may be the light of the world, but when I am gone, it is you who must live it out.” And this fundamental identity is different from others because it is entirely outward-facing. We too must focus on passing the light to others instead of on ourselves. We must be salt and light for *others*, to point them to God.

We all have multiple identities based on different aspects of our lives, but we are able to bring them together to have a sense of ourselves as single individuals.

Jesus describes two identities for his followers: salt of the earth and light of the world. As salt we facilitate relationships with God, bring health and also enable people to taste the flavour that God has provided in the world for us to enjoy.

As our light shines, we are life-enabling, making others glorify God.

These two identities, salt and light, are based on our fundamental identity as children of God. They are outward-facing, pointing others to God.

O God, as salt poured from its shaker flavors our food, by your Spirit, set us free from our attachments to the safe containers, at times confinements, of our existence. Send us out to season your world with your love. In our loving, let us be as light that dispels the darkness of injustice. As salted light, may all whose lives we touch know that you create us holy and call us to become whole. Amen.