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*Cross Shaped Light Bearers*

This week I could not stop thinking about this.

*Stay salty and burn bright.*

“From the beginning of civilization until about one hundred years ago, salt was one of the most *sought after commodities* in history.” The ancients believed that salt would ward off evil spirits. Religious covenants were often sealed with salt. Salt was used for medicinal purposes, to disinfect wounds and treat skin diseases. Roman soldiers were sometimes paid in salt. All according to a book titled *Salt: A World History*.

With his disciples on the mountain, Jesus continues to unfold what the reign of God is like. The elements that create the roux, the stock, the most important ingredients in the world where God is all in all.

Looking them in the eye, he insists: “You are the salt of the earth.” Not- you should be, try harder to be, or “one day you will be” but you *are* the salt of the earth.

One pastor points out: “It’s easy to miss the import of this in our world where salt is cheap and plentiful, but imagine what Jesus’s *first* followers would have heard when he called them salt. Remember what sorts of people Jesus addressed last week. The poor, the mournful, the meek, the persecuted. The outcast, the misfit, the disreputable, the demon-possessed. “*You*,” he told them. “*You* are the salt of the earth.” You who are not cleaned up and shiny and well-fed and fashionable, you who’ve been rejected, wounded, unloved, and forgotten — **you are essential. You are worthwhile.**”

It can’t be earned. Or lost.

We saw it on Christmas morning. Most often it is an infant. With family and sponsors, and the gathered body of Christ as witnesses. Water is poured over them three times. Buried with Christ and raised with him. Placed at home in God. They are baptized. Covered in a white garment, a smaller version of this alb. A sign that we are clothed with Christ himself. A covering that will never wear out and will hold you for all time and seasons. A righteousness that exceeds anything we could earn, deserve, or fashion on our own. Given to you as pure gift.

This child of God is anointed with oil, given the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ alone. The only things you will ever need. After that a deacon will step forward and present a candle, burning brightly. Lit from our paschal candle. The flame first lit in the memorial garden

around the saints at the great vigil of Easter. Jesus' words become our own as they speak to this little one saying:

“Let *your* light so shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven.”

Not when you are older and wiser, more accomplished or productive. Not only when you have a portfolio or assets. Not when your life is *figured out*. Not when you can light it yourself with your own kindling. Today. And not just back when you were busier, not when you were more useful or helpful. Not when you were younger, stronger and healthier. Today.

Jesus looked and says “You are the light of the world.” It can't be earned or lost.

Last Thursday the church celebrated the feast of the Presentation of the Lord of the Lord also known as candlemas. The 40th day after Christmas. It's a day where candles that burn throughout the year are blessed. Celebrating that Jesus is the light no darkness can overcome. All candles in a way are bearing witness to his light that shines in every darkness. Even these that burn each time we gather.

This light- Christ himself burned alongside the disciples, the lost and forsaken was led to the cross, seemingly snuffed out by the powers of sin and then hidden in a tomb. Yet on the other side of the grave the light shone still. In the garden, death met its match. Not even its power that seems so all consuming will overcome this persistent light. Not today, not ever. And this light still burns alongside you. He illuminates your path with his impossible promises of a hope beyond what can be seen with the naked eye. Sitting in his glow the miracles of forgiveness and newness spring up like rivers in the desert.

This Christ is the one who says to you: You are salt and light. That you is broad enough for even you. You are indispensable. You are important. You matter. Your experiences are valid and you are valued. You, like candles, are signs of Christ flickering in the world.

Even when you feel like you've been snuffed out. In your vulnerability and failure the light comes to you and flickers in your midnight.

As someone said, “you notice when salt and light are missing.” That is why every liturgy ends with “Go!” You who have been nourished and named. Go. Don't keep this salt and light hidden or stowed away. Don't hoard it in the cabinet or for your own benefit.

Your neighbor needs them. Use your salt to bring out the flavors that we need but haven't encountered yet. Let your saltiness point us beyond our narrow palate. So we can taste the complex and multilayered flavornotes of God's love.

I know so many here who encourage others to share what they have. Like our confirmation mentors.

Use your light to shine on those who have been in the shadows for too long. Let your candle bring warmth to those who need it. And go to places where the lights of others can show you things about God, yourself, and the world you could have never seen on your own. Where will you find Christ's light burning? Whose candle will show you a way you could have never found by yourself?

At the beginning of black history month let us continue to seek out the lights of our black siblings as their joy and wisdom shows us white folks the path ahead where we all can flourish. Go there, and follow.

Let your light- given you from this pillar of fire be a protest against things that keep us bound. Let it be a protest against loneliness and isolation, fear and suspicion, sin and death. Hunger and injustice as Isaiah says.

“The LORD will guide you continually, satisfy your needs in parched places, make your bones strong. You shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.” The light will lead you all the way. And when you cannot hold your light anymore let others come and hold it for you. For Christ shines alongside you especially when your life is dimmed and will guide you ever forward. Nothing can put it out and its light was never dependent on you in the first place.

Stay salty, burn bright, and go.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.