

Sermon – David R. Lyle
David R. Lyle
Grace Lutheran Church
5 Epiphany – Year A
8 February 2026

“Salt and Light”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. I was away last weekend at a hockey tournament with our daughter, Greta. I am always grateful for such times. It’s an incredible thing to have that one-on-one time with a child, watching them do something they love and seeing them becoming the people they are, the people God made them to be. But I was reminded of something else, too. Hockey stinks. I mean, it’s awesome and wonderful and exciting. But it stinks. Hockey gear is not pleasant to be around. Every time I returned to our hotel room, I was surprised anew by the not-so-fragrant aroma. But within minutes, I had acclimated again. You stop noticing such things after a while, only to be surprised all over again the next time you leave and return. It’s amazing what we can get used to.
2. There’s a lot in the air these days. Some things are hard to miss. Like many of you, I found myself appalled this week when the president posted blatantly racist content to social media – a video since deleted but not apologized for. Depicting Black people in this way taps into the old, old story of racism. To show people as less than human was a good way to support slavery and segregation, and it’s a good way to advance an agenda of hatred today. But it is antithetical to the way of Jesus Christ, and we speak with both condemnation and invitation. Condemnation because such messaging has no proper place in our public discourse. And invitation because the call is to more than crossing the low bar of basic civility. As people of the gospel of

- Jesus Christ, a gospel that shows no partiality, we invite all those in positions of power and leadership to leave racism and hatred behind forever. Just because it's in the atmosphere doesn't mean we should become acclimated.
3. What else have we gotten used to, in the world around us and in our own hearts? As we continue in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus speaks to his purpose. He has come not to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfill. Jesus today opens our doors to ourselves with a law that reveals us to be people who have fallen short. God's law, given to us as gift, teaches us to love God and neighbor. God's law calls us, as Isaiah tells us today, to stand against injustice and oppression, to work for those who hunger for food and for righteousness. And God's law makes clear that we have each, in our own particular ways, failed to fully live into God's ways. I think that sometimes we mistake the message of Jesus as a gospel of tolerance. That because God loves us, God will put up with us and our sin, and therefore anything goes. No. Jesus' gospel is one of forgiveness. Jesus doesn't put up with our sin. He puts it away. Takes it to the cross and leaves it in the tomb. You, friends, are sinners. And you, friends, are forgiven, gifted with the righteousness of Christ and transformed by the work of the Holy Spirit. The stench of sin and death is left behind, and a new wind is blowing.
 4. So, what is God making you to be? Jesus tells us today. You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. In the world of sin and suffering, injustice and oppression, you are the salt of the earth. You are the ones sent by Jesus to season and preserve with love and hope, with mercy and grace. When this world's brokenness seems overwhelming, remember that you are salt, and that a little goes a long way. And while Jesus warns against losing your flavor, which happened to salt in his day because it would be mixed with other minerals, it's also true that salt cannot lose its flavor. Salt remains salt, and you remain a child of God, because that's what Jesus has made you.

5. As you are salt for the earth, working for the well-being of your neighbors, you are also light for the world. Just as salt does not exist for itself, but to make other things better, so does light not exist for itself but to make things visible. We do good work in this world not for our own glory or prestige, but to make visible the glory and goodness of God. In this world of darkness, goodness knows we need the light. Among the knickknackery and nonsense on my desk is one of my favorite photographs. I love the picture for two reasons. First, because it's a picture of Erika, and she's the best. And second, because I took it in the middle of night without using the camera's flash. We were sitting on our balcony overlooking the Sognefjord in Norway. It was not long past the summer solstice and the sun never really got around to fully setting. As people of the light, the darkness cannot overwhelm us. A flicker or glimmer is enough. The sun does not fully set because the Son is forever raised. Yes, the shadows are long in this world, but you are light. And with light, like salt, a little goes along way.

6. People of God, Jesus has done all that is needful for you. You are forgiven and free. You are salt and light. We cannot fully change the world, but we also need not accept it as it is. We need not acclimate. Called by the covenant of your baptism into the world, fling wide the doors. Air it out. Christ is alive. The Spirit is working. We may have a long way to go, but a little goes a long way. Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. Amen.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.