

You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. You.

But honestly, it feels a little bit ridiculous to stand up here and declare to you:

Each one of you is bright, capable of amazing things.

Seriously. Ridiculous. We sit here in a room full of over-achievers. In a normal week, you all are affecting more change in the world than I can even comprehend. You don't need me to tell you that you're capable.

But it's curious, this salt, light thing. Really, they're insignificant. Salt, important, yes, but ubiquitous. It's everywhere. Especially today. Light, well, that's easy. Plenty to go around.

Perhaps I should rephrase then?

Each one of you is superfluous, without you life would go on...

Hmmmm. That's not right either....

I was going through the notes from our visioning process the other day, and over and over again I saw the phrase – Let's not get too Jesus-y. Well, I've got to tell you, phrases like that pique my interest. There's a story there, I'm sure lots of them.

So I asked about it at our vision catalyst meeting—why is it that folks are so uncomfortable with the Jesus thing? With the bible? We hemmed and hawed for a long time, giving real, but incomplete answers:

- we don't want to beat people up with the bible
- we want to be welcoming and inclusive, and, well, Jesus makes some folks uncomfortable.
- So many other folks have made Jesus out to be judgmental—we need to stop that.

But then, one member of the team got really honest. and that changed the course of everything, fundamentally shifted the paradigm. She said: for me, in my life, I'm always the competent one. The expert. I like to know what I'm doing. And when it comes to the bible, I'm just so lost. And I don't like that feeling. And we all understood exactly what she meant.

Truth is, I think we all like to feel competent. Like we know what we're doing. And when we don't we call in the expert that does. Need a boiler fixed, call in the boiler-man, need your taxes done, call in the tax accountant.

Indeed, seminaries are full of folks who want to go to school to become experts on God, as if filling their heads with knowledge will somehow bring them closer to the divine, thereby giving them the authority to go and grace the world with their knowledge.

Jesus has a word for that—it's called a Pharisee.

And it's true of each one of us-- as we yearn to be an expert, we lean ever closer to that brutal reality: we can never learn it all, and even if it could, it won't earn us a place in the kingdom of heaven.

And so when we realize when we can't be an expert ourselves... well then we just hire one.

But, you see, the problem is that experts have this way, of not just giving information, but telling people how to use it. Many of us get paid to do that. And that's exactly what the Pharisees did. They were part of a political and social movement trying lead people back to a greater adherence to the law. There were telling people what the law was, and demanding people stick to it.

But as Jesus saw it, they were leading people to facts, setting folks against each other, and not into relationship. And that's the rub for us today, we rely so much on experts (ourselves and others), that we avoid the relationship.

Yes, it's about Relationship. Once again. Relationship.

The beatitudes from last week, about relationship. Salt, light, keeping the law. About relationship, about honoring the other, about community. All of this: relationship.

As Jesus sat on that mountain, he was speaking to the lowly. Folks none of us would ever think of as experts. Folks who were sick, destitute, desperate, nothing. People who held no formal power in society. And these are the ones he calls light and salt.

But here's what's interesting, curious, (pulling out a little of my expertise here), the word used for you is plural. Y'all. The group of you. The community. The connectedness of you. Collectively.

And here's the thing, an expert is no longer an "expert" when he or she is truly connected to the community. She's not telling people what to do, she's listening to her community and they strategize solutions together. He's not declaring the "right" answer, he's creatively engaging possibility in the midst of others who carry a different wisdom.

And, when we're all sitting around with the Bible in our hands—none of us can claim to be experts. Not a one of us. No matter how long you've spent in seminary, this book, full of salt and light, requires community, relationship, digging into it together, in order to make sense of it. And when we fail to do that... perhaps that's when we get too Jesus-y.

So let's try this again...

You all, bound together in the body of Christ, are bright, salty people, capable of amazing things. *And it's all because of Jesus.*

There. That's better.

It's a hard concept. One made elusive by our independent-minded western culture. But it turns out your saltiness, your light is already creeping out into the world, plentiful and abundant.

RLC has a long and storied history of ministering to those who pass through this neighborhood. In the 70's and 80's it was opening a pre-school in a neighborhood desperate for a place for children. Today, it is welcoming the young people who pass through, staying for only a while, then carrying some of your salt to far away places, forever shaped by RLC.

In the 80's you collectively agreed to take a risk, offering your house of worship as a place of safety for those fleeing the brutal civil war in El Salvador. Earlier in this decade, you collectively took the risk to call Jen Rude as your pastor, even as the powers that be had declared her unfit for ministry simply because she is a lesbian.

And those are just a few of the stories. I know there are so many more. As God is still, so clearly at work amongst you.

So, despite our creeping desire to be Pharisees, experts:

You. You all are the salt of the earth. You, you all are the light of the world.

And for this I cannot help but say,

Thanks be to God.