

Sermon preached at OCC, 23 February 2025

*Let us delight in the law of the Lord and meditate on God's teachings, day and night. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Matthew 5:13-16

### ***Being Salt and Light***

What happens when salt loses its flavour or when light is hidden under a basket? These words from Jesus in Matthew 5:13-16 are not just metaphors; they are a calling - a challenge for us as Christians to engage with the world while maintaining our distinct identity. Last Saturday, I attended the Northern Presbytery Leadership Conference & Business Meeting, where this very theme, *Salt and Light*, was explored. The keynote speaker, Rev. Dr. Paul Windsor, delivered a compelling message that deepened my understanding of what it truly means to live as salt and light in the world.

We often emphasize the benefits of salt and light - salt enhances flavour and preserves, while light dispels darkness. However, Dr Windsor framed these elements in two keywords: salt as involvement and light as distinctiveness. In our mission as the church, we are called to be deeply involved in our communities, improving and enriching lives (like our commitment as an Eco-Church). At the same time, we are to maintain our Christian distinctiveness, staying true to our faith in Jesus Christ.

The challenge, however, is balance. Too much involvement without distinctiveness can dilute our faith while emphasizing distinctiveness without engagement isolates us from the world we are meant to reach. We see this tension reflected throughout Scripture, from the story of Daniel in Babylon to the teachings of Jesus and the apostles. Today, we will explore what it means to live as salt and light, individually and as a church, and how we can harmonise these two aspects.

We heard the story of Daniel, a Jewish noble taken captive by the Babylonians. He served as a minister to the kings of Babylon and Persia. He was known for his wisdom, ability to interpret dreams, and loyalty to God. While living there, Daniel and his friends faced pressure to conform to Babylonian society. He refused to eat meat and wine offered to idols and instead

requested a diet of vegetables and water. Can you identify involvement as salt and distinctiveness as light here?

Jeremiah, a Hebrew prophet, also endured suffering in his homeland. Especially in Jeremiah 29:5-7, he says to his fellow Israelites the following:

Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.<sup>1</sup>

The prophet asks people to establish their community in Babylonia and prepare for an extended stay there. They should also hope for the continued prosperity of Babylonia, of which the Judeans may partake. They should pray to the Lord for it because if it prospers, they, too, will thrive - Salt and light.

In the New Testament, Jesus' entire ministry was an example of being salt and light. Also, among pastoral letters, we find examples. In 1 Peter 2 - 3, we read how the writer of the letter asks the recipients to conduct themselves well among non-believers (2:12) and respect government and authorities (2:18-20), showing the involvement as salt in the community. Especially in 3:8-9, the author urges how Christians deal with hatred differently from the rest of the community – the life as being light in the world:

“Finally, all of you have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing.” (1 Peter 3:8-9)

We also find the example of being salt and light in the story. In our story time, the question for the adults was about the differences between *Swimmy* and other fish. His colour is different – black while others are all red. Also, he swam faster than his brothers and sisters, which means he was light, strong, and agile. He isn't shy and gets along well with other fish. But most

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 29:5-7

importantly, he wouldn't step back when being challenged. While all the red fish are afraid of going swimming again, Swimmy finds a solution that everybody will participate in so that they will resolve the problem altogether. Do you see which part is being salt and which light in this story?

Our OCC council made a formal decision to join Eco-Church in March. But what does it really mean to live as salt and light through this commitment? Being an Eco-Church isn't just about collecting chip packets or attending environmental seminars. It requires real effort, collaboration, and a mindful way of living. Take something as simple as paper towels in the restroom, for example. We often use them without a second thought, but we learned that the used, wet paper towels can't be recycled. As such, if we stop using them, how do we dry our hands? In the past, we used cloth hand towels - but someone had to wash and replace them regularly. If we switch to electric hand dryers, the cost is significant - ranging from \$500 to over \$1000 each. With four toilets in our church, that's a big investment.

This is just one small example of the challenges we face when making choices that honour God's creation. Being salt and light means more than just looking good or following trends; it's about making intentional sacrifices, finding creative solutions, and working together for the greater good. Just as Daniel and his friends stood firm in Babylon, and as Jeremiah urged the Israelites to seek the city's welfare, we, too, are called to live out our faith in practical ways. Whether through Eco-Church initiatives or our everyday decisions, our actions should reflect our commitment to God's creation and one another.

For these reasons, the theme of being salt and light at the Northern Presbytery conference was far from a simple discussion—it was a call to action. Daniel and his friends risked their lives by remaining faithful to their identity in God. Jeremiah urged the Israelites to seek the welfare of the city while staying true to their faith. Jesus was crucified because of His unwavering commitment to bringing light into the darkness.

Today, God calls us to do the same - to be salt and light in our world. But how do we remain deeply involved in our communities (salt) without losing our distinct identity as followers of Christ (light)? How do we engage with the world while staying true to our faith? This is the challenge before us. In what ways is God calling you to be salt in your community? How will

you shine as light without compromise? May God give us the wisdom and courage to live out this calling. Amen.