



## Epiphany 5, Year A – February 6, 2011

Matthew 5: 13-20

### A Homily preached by the Rev'd Tara Livingston

You are the salt of the earth. You are... one of the most common, inexpensive, least exotic substances on the planet. Reassuring, eh? Well, that's not the point at all.

Let's go back to ancient times. Let's go back to what salt meant to those people gathered on a mountainside to hear Jesus preach. It is a time in the world before we began throwing salt on the roads to melt the ice. It is a time, in fact, that roads were built to ensure that salt could be safely traded between countries and kingdoms. It is a time before salt was available in such abundance that it costs mere pennies for a kilo. In ancient times it cost hundreds of denarii for a few pounds and was a commodity of major trade. It was a commodity of such significance that it would have been on the top of the TSX and every other stock exchange and you would be able to gauge how the economy was going by its value. It was of such importance that people would have heard the inherent compliment, accolade and praise in Jesus words.

To hear that you are the salt of the earth - you would have heard that you were valued, exotic and necessary. Even the ancients understood that salt was necessary to every day life. Consuming it helps to regulate how our body uses the liquids it consumes and, in moderation, keeps us healthy and vibrant. Over the past 30 years or so salt has gotten a bad rap but we are coming back to a place where we understand that salt is necessary to life. It is of the earth and an integral part of how we as humans sustain our existence.

You are the salt of the earth. You are necessary. It is required that you see yourself as one of the basic building blocks of the community, of the larger purpose of God. We are the salt of the earth. We cannot lose our focus, lose our passion, lose our complimentary purpose.

But take note: Jesus doesn't say, "If you want to become salt and light, do this...." Or, "before I'll call you salt and light, I'll need to see this from you...." Rather, he says both simply and directly, "You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world." It is, as with last week's Beatitudes, sheer blessing, commendation, affirmation, and commissioning.

I like to cook. I am one of those cooks that uses recipes as suggestions. I am the kind of cook that rarely uses measuring spoons as I learned at the knee my mother and grandmother the meaning of a pinch and a dash. On the shelf above my stove there are a variety of spices. You know, the ones that one would use in every day cooking. Now, when I use pepper, the pepper announces itself in the dish. When you take a bite you say, oh, there's pepper in there. It draws attention to itself and seems to shout "I'm here, I'm here!" But not salt; when used properly, in the correct amount, salt does not announce it's presence but rather it enhances all of the other flavours in the dish. It compliments what's already there. It makes it taste more tomato-y, more beefy, more broccoli-ish. You don't eat it and say, gee, that salt really made that recipe turn out well. You just say, wow, that tastes really good. Jesus does not expect us to call attention to ourselves in our salting efforts. Rather, we are to make others more acceptable, more meaningful, more loving. You are the salt of the earth. We are the people whom God has called to support, to enhance, to compliment everyone around us. We are the salt of the earth whom God has called to help make every circumstance we are in better. We are the salt of

the earth whom God has called to make everyone we meet a better version of themselves.

Jesus didn't say, you are the pepper of the earth – called to draw attention to our presence and announcing our intentions. We are the salt. We are the ones who just show up and get it done. We are the salt. We are the ones who support and sustain others who are doing the work. We are the salt. We are the ones who just stand alongside one another in a way that sustains life and makes it better.

You are the salt of the earth. We are the salt of the earth.

And for that, thanks be to God.