

Gospel and Sermon Transcript -5th Sunday After Epiphany - February 8, 2026

The Holy Gospel is taken from the fifth chapter of Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

You are the salt of the earth.

But if the salt has lost its taste,

how can its saltiness be restored?

It is no longer good for anything,

but is thrown out and trampled underfoot.

You are the light of the world.

A city built on a hill cannot be hid.

People who do not light a lamp and put it under a bushel

basket, but rather they put it on the lamp stand,

and it gives light to all in the house.

In the same way, let your light shine before others

so that they may see your good works and give glory

to your Father in heaven.

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets.

I have come not to abolish, but to fulfill.

For truly, I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away,

not one letter, not one stroke of a letter

will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven.

But whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven, the gospel of our Lord.

Maybe seated.

The Sermon

The sermon I'm going to read to you today is written by Reverend Anna Sutterich, and it's entitled Point to God.

Reverend Sutterich serves St. Martin's Episcopal Church in Ohio, a small, strong congregation that loves God, neighbors, and tries to bring Christ's light into a broken and hurting world.

She lives in Cleveland, Ohio, with her spouse, also a parish pastor, and two small boys and two cats.

Have you ever messed up the salt in a recipe?

Whether you're cooking or baking, you know how it goes.

Everything is perfectly measured, weighed, balanced,
the timing is right, the technique solid.

And then you take that first taste, and it's off.

It's either too salty, the mouth-puckering physical reaction
of salt on the tongue, followed quickly
by the emotional reaction of a ruined dish.

Or it is not salty enough.

The flavors flat and dull, nothing really distinguishing
itself, one-dimensional, boring.

Few recipes or chefs would advertise a dish by saying,
this tastes like salt.

And yet salt is found in nearly everything,
because salt does best its work with other flavors.

It enhances what is already there, draws flavor out,
holds flavor together.

Yet salt doesn't work in a vacuum alone on a plate.

Salt doesn't work in isolation.

In Matthew's version of the Sermon on the Mount
that we hear today, Jesus calls the people
the salt of the earth.

This teaching comes immediately after the Beatitudes,

which we heard last Sunday.

That part where he says, blessed are the meek,
the merciful, the poor in spirit.

Right after these blessings, Jesus
tells the people, and us, of course,
you are the salt of the earth.

Not the hero flavor, but absolutely essential.

He also tells them, you were the light of the world.
And unsurprisingly, Jesus does not
describe a light in isolation, but rather a light that
exists for and within the world.

He says, let your light shine before others,
not so that they may admire you, but so that they
may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

The light that comes from Jesus' love
is not meant to be hidden or hoarded.

It cannot exist in a vacuum or in isolation.

The point of the salt is not the salt itself.

The point of the light is not the light itself.

The point is God's glory.

Neither salt nor light makes sense on its own.

Salt only works in relationship with other ingredients.

Light shines so that others can see.

Jesus' metaphors are about community, not individualism.

They assume connection, relationship,

interdependence, an ecosystem, not a solo performance.

This truth matters because Jesus' teaching, his life,

and the many interpretations of what

it means to follow him today can sometimes feel heavy.

Christianity can begin to feel like a list of obligations,

duties to perform, rules to follow, disciplines to maintain.

We may feel the weight of responsibility and effort

pressing down on us.

Our human impulse towards shame and secrecy

can make living as a Christian feel like constantly failing

a test as if we are unworthy of grace and love

because we haven't done enough, are done well enough.

The cycle of guilt can be lonely and isolating.

The prophet Isaiah lays right into it.

He calls out religious leaders who have learned too far,

leaned too far into obligation and legalism,

but forgotten the abundant spaciousness that comes from God.

He names the fasting, self-inflicted oppression

and penitence that serve only one's own self and reputation.

Spiritual disciplines like fasting and penitence
can be healthy, meaningful, and life-giving,
but only if they point to God.

The messages we receive from the prophet Isaiah and the Messiah,
Jesus, are the same.

Do not perform righteousness for show.

Don't act so that people can see your good works,
but to give glory to God in heaven.

Let your actions loosen the bonds of injustice.

Let them feed the hungry, shelter the oppressed,
and clothe the naked.

The freedom we seek as Christians, as followers of Christ,
is bigger than ourselves and our own self-righteousness.

The goal of our life isn't to be free in the sense
of being able to do whatever we want without consequence.

The freedom we seek through our spiritual practices
and prayers and worship and teaching and learning
is freedom from oppression for all.

What good is fasting if we ignore the hungry?

What good is penitence if we ignore those who are tortured?

What good is religious devotion if we turn away
from the poor, the lonely, the sick, and the forgotten?

The freedom we desire is that all people
may know that they are loved, safe, protected, and nourished.
Spiritually, yes, but also physically, emotionally,
and mentally.

If we are all connected in the spiritual ecosystem
of this broken and hurting world,
then one person oppressed affects each one of us.

It is tempting to leave the reading from Matthew
with the image of the city on a hill.

But after his discussion of salt and light,
Jesus cautions us against taking God's freedom
as a free for all.

The freedom Jesus brings isn't to say
that none of those old laws matter anymore,
but rather to remind us that the law must always
point to God.

Jesus is famous for reinterpreting
the ancient religious law in ways
that challenge religious leaders.

And that's the kind of freedom he brings when he says,
I have come not to abolish, but to fulfill.
He's saying, follow the law.

Do the rights and rituals.

They matter.

But don't do it for show, for self-righteousness,

or for attention.

They only matter when they serve justice and life

for the whole world.

Does your life point to God's freedom?

Look at your calendar, how you spend your time, your budget,

how you spend your money, your relationships,

who receives your energy and care,

the way you travel, where you shop, how you vote,

who you listen to and speak with.

Do these choices point toward the glory of God in heaven?

Do they bring love and justice for the poor, the oppressed,

the lonely, the sick?

Look at your spiritual practices, your prayer life.

Does it exist only privately or only at the dinner table

when guests arrive?

Your Bible study, does it draw you deeper into scripture

and community, or become another excuse for gossip?

Your intentions, fasts, resolutions,

do they bring you closer to God, or are you

using religious disciplines as an excuse to die it?

The ways we welcome, serve, learn, and connect at church matter.

All of our rites and rituals, our traditions and beliefs

and our gifts that God has given us,

they simply must point to God and not ourselves

or our buildings, our legacies, or our reputation.

We have been set free from self-righteousness,

from the talliesheet of sin, from the law of restrictions

by Jesus Christ, through His radical, world-shaking love.

We are neither heroes nor expendable,

but we are essential in the community of God's church

and God's world.

Whatever we do, may we do it in such a way

that all glory is given to God in heaven.

Amen.