

Salt and Light
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Matthew 5: 13-16; 2 Kings 2: 19-22

After we read these words of Jesus and were preparing for today, the first thing we thought about was how we have seen people share their light. We learned about a tradition that is practiced in many cultures throughout the world of giving out bread and salt as part of a welcoming ceremony. It is also given during weddings, housewarming parties, and childbirth. Olivia and I thought it was interesting that Jesus uses salt as his example in the passage, and salt is used as part of a tradition meant to display hospitality today. This caused us to ask this question: how have people in our own lives shared their salt and light?

One way I have seen god's light being spread is through the service of the credo leaders, and their earnest effort to help guide our youth on their way to accepting god and the church. These leaders put in the time and the effort to help explain the bible, the church, and any questions that youth have in confirmation. I am always in awe at how much youth grow in their faith over their confirmation journey. And these teens also help spread their light by serving as leaders and work with other youth in conversation and questioning of what it means to be a Christian and a member of the church. Through these discussions they are given a chance to put their light on a stand. Through this and their statements of faith, they share that light with others.

One way I saw God's light was when I went on the Pittsburgh Mission Trip in middle school. It was very similar to the Philly Project in how Church groups would go repair homes located inside the city. Our homeowner that year was named Helen, and her faith in God was reflected through her personality. She went blind around the age of 40, but was so positive and thankful for all that God placed in her life. This lady lived on only \$12,000 a year, but she was confident that God would provide. We would be upstairs working on her guest room, and we could hear her belt out Gospel music that was playing on her television. We would walk downstairs and often catch her humming and dancing while cleaning the kitchen. She shone her light by spreading joy and putting smiles on everyone's face. Although she had a disability, that did not stop her from living her life for God and reflecting his Word.

In 2 Kings 2 19-22 Elisha uses salt to purify a spring. We should lend ourselves, our own saltiness, to help purify the springs of the world. The spring that Elisha purified was forever clean. Could we, in the same way, partner with others to help purify their muddied wells? One way I have seen this was during the Honduras Trip last summer, we helped entertain and teach children in Nacaome about the importance of clean water, while Living Waters for the World helped install water purification systems. They literally made the water clean, using themselves, the salt of the earth, to do so.

Often times we get caught up in how others are sharing their light, and we forget about how we can share ours. We focus on people who have participated in grand acts of kindness, such as Gandhi, who was the leader of India's independence movement from Great Britain. Instead of using violence, he staged peaceful protests and made impactful speeches. Gandhi once stated, "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others." Martin Luther King Jr. is another man who reflected God's light through his devotion to the Civil Rights Movement. He put his life at risk to bring attention to social justice. He once said, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." Also, our Super Bowl champ Carson Wentz spreads the light of God through his AO1 Foundation. Their mission statement is to provide food and shelter for the underprivileged, offer outdoor activities for those with life-threatening illnesses, U.S. veterans, and those with physical disabilities, and providing service dogs to improve quality of life. Carson Wentz has a tattoo that says "Audience of One" that reflects his desire to only please Jesus.

We see the incredible works of these brave men and end up underestimating our own abilities to make a difference. It is common to get caught up in the struggles in our life and even get so wrapped up in our daily schedules that we do not focus on what God has in store for us.

We do not take the time to stop and have a conversation with someone because we need to be somewhere ASAP! All of us can encourage one another to recognize how we can spread our light and share our salt. Everyone has special gifts and can use them to help others, whether it is through direct service or simple acts of kindness. Both of us have gone on mission trips such as Honduras and Mexico, and our church offers many different ways of serving our communities near and abroad!

My trip to Honduras helped me see others spreading god's light. In 2015, I was asked to join in with a missional partnership with youth in Honduras through our youth ministry. It was interesting to work side by side with youth of another language and culture and share experiences with them. As part of the trip we packaged and delivered bags of food to the local Honduran farmers who were experiencing a severe drought. When we handed out the bags of food, each family received an appropriate amount based on the number of people in their home. At the end, after all the food had been handed out, there were still people waiting who had not received a bag. When other locals who had already received food saw this, they broke open the bags of food and shared them with their neighbors. This is one way I saw them spread god's light - by sharing what little they had with one another.

I have gone to Estado 29 Orphanage for the past two years, and each year I am amazed at God's presence in this tight-knit community. The first year I went, I was extremely nervous, considering that I did not speak Spanish very well. I also had never met any of these kids before. But that fear instantly went away the minute I stepped off the bus. All the kids ran up to us and gave us hugs even though we had never met. Before I arrived, I had the expectation that I was going to help orphans and make a difference in the community. But, it was the complete opposite. Those kids helped me

instead. They showed me extreme hospitality, and there was never one temper tantrum! Kids who were eight years old were looking after three year olds. If you spilled a drink, at least ten of them would run up to help you clean the mess. They showed me what gratitude looks like, for these kids shared everything they owned, though they did not have much. They also showed me how we are supposed to live as a community, not as individuals. Only together can the light of Christ be reflected more brightly in the world. Overall, the experience made me want to spread God's light and share my salt with others back home.

Westminster also offers opportunities to serve locally. You can participate as a credo leader, helping to lead confirmation students as they become members of the church. By helping show them your light, you allow them the chance to show their own light. Another activity that I participate in is Bridge Academy. They host an afterschool program in Coatesville which helps kids with their homework, gives them a safe space to grow spiritually, academically, and to form strong relationships. Usually they work on math and reading, then we go upstairs for a bible lesson. After that there is snack, and a chance to use the computers or play games with the other kids. This program encourages the youth living in Coatesville to build a relationship with God and to discover their talents. Some of these kids come from a rough background, but Bridge Academy reassures that God is always present and can help them use their gifts for his glory.

Another chance to engage in local volunteering is Broad Street Ministry. It is a Church community in downtown Philly that focuses on "radical hospitality." It offers worship, meals, art activities, and more. When I participated in this ministry for the first time, I was extremely impressed by the hospitality they demonstrated. They hosted a lunch for those experiencing homelessness, and instead of forming an assembly line, the servers would deliver the meals to the guests at their tables. They also took the time to talk to them and build relationships. Not only did the servers spread their light through their hospitality, but they encouraged those experiencing homelessness to discover their salt. This mission focuses on encouraging those considered "low in society" to discover their gifts that God granted to them, for we are all loved and equal in God's eyes. Everyone has something to offer.

These are all ways to participate and share your light locally. Simple acts of kindness are another way to let your light shine. Whether you just hold open a door, help someone find something, or even just compliment them, we can use every day as a way to impact others. Just by being there with those around us you can brighten their day with some of God's light. God challenges us to live in the moment, to be there for someone, instead of rushing away to the next activity.

For example, I went on the Young Life Winter Retreat in New York this year with a couple of close friends from my school. I was nervous because I had not been to a lot of events for Young Life, and I did not know a lot of the people. A girl named Peyton made me feel extremely welcome on the first day we arrived. She approached me and said that she knew I was new to Young Life and that she was extremely nervous the

first year she went. She said that she was here for me if I ever needed to talk and that she would love to spend more time with me over the course of the weekend. Someone had told her the same thing on the first retreat she went to, so she wanted to do the same. A simple act of kindness like that can make a huge difference. I immediately felt included and had a wonderful weekend meeting my new best friends and learning God's Word. I also learned that kindness is contagious. After someone made Peyton feel included, she wanted to do the same.

God wants us to use our gifts to benefit our neighbors. That could mean helping others abroad or participating in our own communities. God challenges all of us to step out of our comfort zones and help others that are struggling. Instead of turning your back, offer a hand, and help show others the light of god. Let us all, as the sons and daughters of God, use our salt and light to make a difference.