

5th Sunday after the Epiphany, St. John's Olney, 9 Feb 2020
The Reverend Henry P. McQueen
Isaiah 58:1-12; 1 Corinthians 2:1-12; Matthew 5:13-20; Psalm 112:1-9

S.D.G.

So time for a little bit of Biblical trivia. It seems odd to suggest that salt can lose its saltiness but that is exactly what we heard today, and the phrase would have been understood in the context that Jesus shares. So let's explore how that could be.

In Jesus' era ovens were often community ovens, they were located in a shared space and used by entire village in small villages or by an extended family in larger communities. At the core of the oven was a block of salt, and it was upon this block of salt that a dung patty was placed as fuel for the oven. In forming the dung patty salt was added to the mixture.

While we might use salt as a seasoning, this salt had a completely different purpose, it was a catalyst. The dung patty lit easier, and burned better, because of the salt mixed into the patty and the salt block upon which it rested. The catalytic nature of the salt resulted in a better heat and easier fire management while cooking. There came a time though that the salt block lost its effectiveness. Not being a chemist I can't explain why it would lose its effectiveness as a catalyst but when it did they simply tossed it out into the road and replaced it with a new salt block.

So now if anyone ever asks, you can explain the significance of salt losing its saltiness. But in this Gospel, Jesus is concerned with who we are, and who we are being.

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

So to paraphrase Jesus, you are the catalyst. You are the shining example of God's good works.

Without getting too far ahead of ourselves let's take a step back: Jesus said "*You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, 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.”

The city on the hill is a reference to Jerusalem, but it is also a pointer to each of us; if we are standing front and center, or if we are on top of the hill, we are in plain view for all to see, and Jesus is telling us to set an example by the works that we do. “...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

Before each worship service we light our altar candles. We use a BIC lighter to light the lucifer, and then we reverently light the candles. Striking our thumb against that little wheel creates a spark and the BIC lighter becomes a catalyst to light the candles. You need a catalyst to light a lamp. You need a catalyst to spark the good works that will give glory to your Father in heaven.

I would suggest that among us there are as many ideas for good works as there are people here. Each of us, with time and prayer, can cultivate an idea that can become a lamp on the lampstand. It may already be burning bright within us, or it may need a little coaxing in order to burn more brightly. It may need a catalyst.

Today I want to offer you a catalyst for your light, I want to offer you a catalyst for your idea.

Each of you is about to receive a gift, a catalyst; and you are able to use it in any way you wish. There are no strings attached, just a responsibility to share your story.

As I give each of you a fresh \$10 bill I will share with you some ideas. Not the only ideas, not the ideas that need to be acted upon, just ideas to get you thinking:

- 1) give \$10 to a homeless person on a street corner
- 2) give \$1 to 10 homeless people on 10 street corners
- 3) buy wool and knit hats and scarves for the homeless
- 4) buy flour and bake bread to sell and donate the \$ to STJEC, or give the bread to a pantry
- 5) buy tomato seeds, grow the tomatoes, make gazpacho and sell it donating the \$ to STJEC

- 6) put the \$10 in the collection plate - it is a bit of a cop-out but perfectly acceptable
- 7) buy your self a coffee and danish - again perfectly acceptable, self-care can be important but you might want to ask God about that one
- 8) pay for lunch for the person in line behind you at Chipotle
- 9) invest the money in penny stocks and donate the proceeds
- 10) go to Vegas and play black jack donating the proceeds

There are no limits on what you can do with the money. This is a gift - there are no strings attached. There is a responsibility, a responsibility to light a lamp for Jesus and to share your story.

You can light the lamp today, or it might take months. There is no time limit; certainly growing a vegetable garden will take months compared to giving the money to someone on the street - but by the end of this year tell us your story. Tell us what you did, tell us how you lit a lamp for Jesus.

You have in your hands a catalyst, use it to light a lamp for Jesus. *“let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”*

Amen,