

Living what we believe: Being Salt and Light in a Time of Lament
Psalm 112:1-9 | Matthew 5: 13-20
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At Plymouth Presbyterian Church
St. Helens, Oregon
February 8, 2026

I don't think there is anyone alive who likes job performance reviews except maybe the Human Relations people. Even if you are doing a great job, review and evaluation are stressful. A few years ago Preaching Magazine ran a list of some quotes from actual Job Performance Reviews. I thought I'd share a few:

"I wouldn't allow this employee to reproduce, he must have gotten into the gene pool when the lifeguard wasn't looking."

"This associate is really not so much of a has-been but a won't be."

"Works well under constant supervision and cornered like a rat in a trap."

"This young lady has delusions of adequacy."

"Sets low personal standards and consistently fails to achieve them."

"This employee is depriving a village somewhere of an idiot."

"Gates are down, lights are flashing, but the train isn't coming."

"If you stand close enough to him, you can hear the ocean."

"Some drink from the fountain of knowledge; he only gargled."

Those performance reviews would not have spurred me on to higher achievement. Jesus on the other hand, motivates in quite a different way. He says,

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

These words don't sound the same in every season.

There are times when they feel like encouragement.
There are times when they feel like responsibility.
And there are times—like this one—when they feel heavy.

In recent weeks, many of us have carried grief we did not go looking for. We have heard of American citizens killed in encounters with federal authorities. We have listened to official statements that do not tell the whole truth. We have watched truth bend, blur, and sometimes disappear altogether. And we are left with sorrow, anger, confusion, and a deep weariness of spirit.

The Bible has a name for moments like this. It calls them *lament*.

Lament is not a lack of faith.
Lament is faith that refuses to lie about the pain.

The psalms are full of it:
“How long, O Lord?”
“Why do you hide your face?”
“Why do the powerful go unchallenged?”

Jesus knew lament. He wept at a graveside. He cried out on the cross. He did not rush past suffering to get to resurrection.

So when Jesus says, “You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world,” he is not speaking to people who have everything figured out. He is speaking to people who are living under empire, people who know loss, people who are afraid to say the wrong thing, people who wonder whether their lives still make a difference.

Salt, in Scripture, is a sign of faithfulness. It preserves what would otherwise decay. But salt does not shout. It works quietly, slowly, often unnoticed.

Light, in Scripture, does not erase the darkness. It shares the space with it. One candle does not banish the night—but it makes the night different.

In times like these, being salt and light does not mean having answers. It means **refusing to pretend the pain isn’t real.**

- It means we do not rush to explanations when people have died.
- It means we do not accept false stories simply because they come from those in power.
- It means we remember names, faces, families, and grief.

Lament says: *This should not be.*

Many of us are tired. Some of us feel our voices are small, our reach limited, our energy not what it once was. And yet Jesus does not withdraw his words.

Jesus does not say, “You were the light.”
He does not say, “You will be again someday.”

He says, “You are.”

What may look like quiet faithfulness:
– lighting a candle and praying when words fail
– telling the truth gently when lies are loud
– refusing to grow cynical or cruel
– teaching the next generation that every life bears God’s image
– grieving without turning away

Eric Butterworth once told about a college professor who had his sociology class go into the Baltimore slums to get case histories of 200 young boys. The students were asked to write an evaluation of each boy's future. In every case the students wrote, "He hasn't got a chance."

Twenty-five years later another sociology professor came across the earlier study. He had his students follow up on the project to see what had happened to these boys. With the exception of 20 boys who had moved away or died, the students learned that 176 of the remaining 180 had achieved extraordinarily successful as lawyers, doctors and businessmen. The professor was astounded and decided to pursue the matter further. Fortunately, all the men were in the area and he was able to ask each one, "How do you account for your success?" In each case the reply came with feeling, "There was a teacher."

That teacher was still alive, so he sought her out and asked the elderly but still alert woman what magic formula she had used to pull these boys out of the slums into successful achievement. The teacher's eyes sparkled and her lips broke into a gentle smile. "It's really very simple," she said. "I loved those boys." No wonder those boys succeeded. Their teacher loved them..

Love is not flashy.
Love is not fast.
Love is often born in lament.

Jesus himself stood in the darkness and did not look away. He entered it. He named it. And still, he trusted that God was at work, even when it was hard to see.

So today, we do not rush to hope.
We sit with grief.
We tell the truth.
We pray.

And we trust that even now—even here—even in our weariness—God's light has not gone out.

A small flame still burns.
A little salt still preserves.

And for today, that is enough. We are being salt and light in a time of lament. Amen.