

# Who, Me?

a sermon  
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Matthew 5:13–20

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I have this recurring dream.

Actually, I have a few of them, certain dreams that my sleeping-yet-still-imagining mind returns to again and again.

Why it does this, I don't know for sure.

Well, maybe I do, a bit. Even though it has often struck me as a little out there, some people I know are certain that recurring dreams are meaningful and representational.

Yeah, I said it sounded a bit out there.

But I think what they mean is that dreams, especially recurring dreams, represent unresolved *stuff*, things we need to work out, perhaps hurts or regrets from long ago we've not dealt with, or maybe a big change we've been putting off for far too long.

It's not been easy or quick for me, but I think I believe them.

Anyway, among my several recurring dreams is the one that has me all panicked because I keep missing a certain class in school. If I don't pass this course, I can't graduate, or move forward, or have a life, or *something* ... the dream doesn't really make this clear. What is clear is a deep and abiding sense of dread I have throughout the dream. And then I wake up. Good morning!

Now, I have heard from some people that they have a recurring dream much like mine, the repeatedly-missing-class dream. At first I was surprised. How could it be that other people would have my dream (or one like it)? It sounds like some sci-fi story.

But then this began to make sense to me. It makes sense that other people, even a *lot* of people, have had a similar real-life experience as I have. And it's that experience which gives rise to this kind of dream, which then becomes somewhat common. This experience is the experience of feeling pressure in school, along with having to make adjustments in your life to deal with that pressure,

because you can't keep up,  
or your interests have changed,  
or you find that you're not cut out for that subject area,  
or you realize that you hate what you're studying.

Sound familiar?

If so, then maybe you and I have had similar dreams.

Likewise lying in the background for a good many people is the experience of being called on in class. Now *that's* the stuff of bad dreams! Right? I think a lot of people have that as one of their recurring dreams.

"Student, what is the answer to number eight?"

"Who, me?"

“Yes, you. What is the answer to number eight?”

And inside you’re thinking: Number eight? Number *eight*? Why couldn’t she ask me about number three? I got *that* far.

So, with all your classmates looking on, you give some lame answer, a stumbling answer, the *wrong* answer.

“Who, me?” Whether said or just thought, “who, me?” is that almost automatic response when someone’s telling you something, or asking you something, and you don’t feel up to it.

They can’t mean me. I can’t be the one.

“Who, me?” is a verbal tic meant to avoid responsibility.

It’s an impulsive strategy to deflect attention.

It’s the last, futile, refuge of the unprepared.

“Who, me?”



Jesus tells the disciples, “You are the salt of the earth.... You are the light of the world.” And, as he tells them that, he is also telling *us* that.

Because most everywhere in the gospels when Jesus is teaching or guiding or correcting or blessing his disciples, we are *supposed* to hear him teaching or guiding or correcting or blessing *us*.

And that’s because he *is*.

These are not just words from long ago. They are as fresh today as they were then, because the Lord Jesus, who spoke them, is as fresh and vital and alive today as he was then ... more so, even; and because the Holy Spirit make these words from long ago *living* words that come alive in all our present moments.

The Spirit welcomes us into world of the Bible, making it possible that in the disciples’ story we can find our story, and from their service we can learn how to be servants of the Lord Jesus.

And as we do,

in their mistakes we can recognize our mistakes,  
in their challenges we can see our challenges,  
in their joy we can discover our joy.

So, yes, Jesus tells the disciples, and he tells us, “You are the salt of the earth.... You are the light of the world.”

And it would be entirely natural if each one of us answered with “Who, me?”

That’s right. Who, me? He can’t mean me. He really can’t. I’m not all that. I don’t measure up. I can’t rise to that challenge.

He must be talking to someone else.

After all, it sure would be a bit conceited — wouldn’t it? — to go around claiming “I am the light of the world.” Sounds a bit above our pay grade. Isn’t *Jesus* the light of the world? Isn’t that *his* job, his role, who he is and what he does? It’s reasonable to feel a bit uncomfortable to hear this phrase applied to anyone but him. To call oneself “the light of the world” seems arrogant.

And then there’s that “salt” thing. When we say that someone is “the salt of the earth,”

we usually mean that he or she is good folk;  
we mean that the person is reliable;  
we mean that we can count on that person to do right and speak the truth;  
we mean that he or she is plainspoken and honest.

And that's all good stuff, good to say about other good people. Yet to call *oneself* "the salt of the earth" seems, for good reason, a bit arrogant.

But when Jesus calls us "salt" he means more than to affirm us as good folk. And when he calls us "light" he is not complimenting us on how wonderful we are.

What he means

is that the disciples of Jesus must be noticed,  
the students of Jesus must make a difference,  
the followers of Jesus must be distinctive,  
the servants of Jesus must stand out,

How?

How?

Well, simply

as Jesus-people among those who don't accept Jesus,  
as forgiven sinners among sinners yet to embrace his forgiveness,  
as bearers and sharers of Christ's mercy among those suspicious of mercy,  
as his peacemakers among the troubled and violent,  
as friends to strangers,  
as sanctuaries for those seeking refuge,  
all from him and to him who became our friend and gave us sanctuary.

*That's* how the one belonging to Jesus

is distinctive,  
different,  
salt and light.



Hmm. That's an awful lot. Right? Who can possibly live up to that? Who among us is anywhere close to becoming that?

Yet here's the thing.

Jesus doesn't say, "You should be salty and bright, which you aren't yet, so get on it."

He doesn't say, "Please work on yourselves so that you will one day become salt and light."

He doesn't command us to transform ourselves into salt and light.

He doesn't invite us into a process of self-improvement.

He doesn't send us all to Barnes and Noble, or online to Amazon.com, to get the latest self-help books (or e-books) on becoming salt and light.

No.

Jesus tells us that we *are* salt and light. “You *are* the salt of the earth.... You *are* the light of the world.”

This is who we *are*. Not who we are *becoming*. Not something we are *striving* to be. We don’t have to *become* salt and light. We *are* salt and light. It is simply who we are.

And let’s be clear: this is not our own doing.

We are salt and light because of our relationship to Jesus. He has *made* us to be salt and light. They are his *gift* to us. They come to us simply because of our being joined to him.

And yet, we can deny it.

We can allow our saltiness to become sullied by the values of the prevailing culture.

We can hide our light,  
from those who would benefit from that light,  
or from those who might be threatened by it.

We can shut ourselves off from those we don’t know.

We can live in a way that makes no difference in the world.

We can lose all our distinctiveness that is grounded,  
not in ourselves,  
but in scripture,  
in baptism,  
in the Lord’s holy feast.

It seems pretty clear what happens, what so often happens.

We succumb to old fears.  
We act out of old wounds.  
We obsess over recurring dreams.

And then, we settle. And when we settle, we become

just another social organization,  
just another club,  
just another group,  
that exists only for itself,  
always confirming and never confronting the status quo.

So even though Jesus gives us the gift of being salt and light, even though it is his blessing that we *are* these, we can deny these characteristics, we can keep ourselves from interacting with and thus impacting others with the holy love of the Lord Jesus.

And when we do that, we set out on a path that threatens to bring our gifts and ourselves to ruin.

Jesus has made us to be salt and light. And he has made us this way not for our own enjoyment. It’s so we can make a difference. It’s so we can help others. It’s so we can point the way to Jesus. It’s so that, through us, others may come to know Jesus, and, through us, others may be blessed by Jesus.

“Who, me?” we might say.

Actually, that should be, “Who, us?”

Because the “you” of our Lord’s “You are the salt of the earth; you are the light of the word” is a *group* “you,” a “Y’all.” He is saying that all Christians together are salt and light. Not each one of us by our lonesome. Not so that one of us alone can say, “I am the salt of the earth and the light of the world.” What we can say, in truth, is that “*We* are the salt of the earth, and *we* are the light of the world.”

Just as it’s true only in Jesus and because of Jesus, it’s true also only when we are part of the community that Jesus forms out of the waters of baptism and that he feeds with his own body and blood.

We are not alone in this work. We are together in it, joined by the Spirit with all the faithful of Christ in every time and place.

*We* are the salt of the earth. *We* are the light of the world.



So let us eagerly take up the work of being who we already are, dropping the “Who, me?” responses that come so easily from us when Jesus calls. Let us simply be

Jesus-people among those who don’t accept Jesus,  
forgiven sinners among sinners yet to embrace his forgiveness,  
bearers and sharers of Christ’s mercy among those suspicious of mercy,  
his peacemakers among the troubled and violent,  
friends to strangers,  
sanctuaries for those seeking refuge,  
all from him and to him who became our friend and gave us sanctuary.

*To Jesus Christ, who loves us  
and freed us from our sins by his blood  
and made us to be a kingdom,  
priests of his God and Father,  
to him be glory and dominion  
forever and ever.  
Amen.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup>From Revelation 1:5-6, NRSV