Hi,

I hope you were able to join us for worship this weekend. Our worship team is doing such a splendid job in this crisis.

* My Monday class on Matthew will be this afternoon at 3pm on [my own Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/scottengle). Again, no account needed, just follow the link. But you will need an account to comment. If you and I are not friends on Facebook, just send me a friend request and we will be.
* Likewise for the Tuesday class on Genesis tomorrow at 11:45.
* This Sunday, my Sunday morning class will resume on-line, also on my Facebook page. We will meet at noon on Sunday, allowing 11:00 worshipers to join us. Since it is Palm Sunday we will be talking about the last days of Jesus, from Palm Sunday through Good Friday.
* Don’t forget, links to the on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org/).

In my previous email (#12), we reflected upon the Beatitudes, which are followed in Matthew’s gospel by Jesus’ call to his disciples that they are to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. This is no less our call today, even in the Time of Virus.

***Matthew 5:1-2, 13-16 (NRSV)***

**When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. 2 Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:**

**[What follows are known as the Beatitudes, e.g., “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God . . .”]**

**13 “You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.**

**14 “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. 15 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. 16 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.**

*Salt?*

Salt has many uses. Some positive, some negative. A swim in the ocean is always good for healing small nicks and scrapes. All animals need a certain amount of salt in their diet to live. What guy doesn’t crave salty snacks. Of course, salt also kills. The Dead Sea is sometimes referred to as the Salt Sea. Photographs of its shore reveal rocks and gravel covered with layers of dried, white salts. Nothing can live there. The salts have squeezed all life out of the environment.

Drawing on the contrasting properties, the biblical writers generously used images of salt. Sometimes it was used as an image of seasoning, preserving, or purifying. But salt is also used as an image of death, desolation, or even a curse. God’s covenant with his people is occasionally referred to as a covenant of salt, drawing upon the preserving qualities of salt (Leviticus 2:13; Numbers 18:19; 2 Chronicles 13:5). Newborn babies were rubbed with salt as a symbol of new beginnings. Paul urged the Christians to speak with “grace, seasoned with salt” (Colossians 4:6). Yet, more than a millennia before Paul, Abilmelech spread salt across the ground of a razed city as a sign of a curse (Judges 9:45).

In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount with the Beatitudes, a very moving reversal of the world’s value systems. Then he immediately speaks to the disciples about their own vocation, their own call to actually be God’s people, a community grounded firmly in the kingdom of God. Jesus uses three metaphors to make his point. The first is salt; the second is light; the third is the city.

*Contrasts and choices*

Jesus calls upon the contrasting uses of salt. On the one hand, salt gives life, but on the other, it can be rendered useless. Which sort of disciple will John, Andrew, Peter and the rest be? Will they be good for something, or, like the tasteless salt, will they be good for nothing? The choice is stark and clear. It is one way or the other. Up or down. No shades of gray or ambiguity.

To make the same point again, Jesus uses the image of light. Will his disciples hide their light or will they raise it up and let it shine so that the whole world can be seen in the light? Which will it be? And why are they to be a shining light? So that all people in all places can see, through the good works of the disciples, that God is God and that Jesus is Lord of all creation.

Likewise, a city that sits on a hill is going to be seen by everyone, whether the city wants to be seen or not. The world will be looking at the disciples whether they want to be seen or not. Our life is a witness to God whether we want it to be or not.

M. Eugene Boring writes, “The salt and light sayings picture mission as inherent to discipleship, as saltiness is essential to salt and shining is essential to light. For salt, being salty is not optional. With these three metaphors of salt, light, and city, the Matthean Jesus strikes a death blow to all religion that is purely personal and private. . . The community that lives by the power of unostentatious prayer in the inner room (Matthew 6:6) is not an introverted secret society shielding itself from the world, but is a city set on a hill whose authentic life cannot be concealed.”

In these three brief metaphors Jesus appeals to our imaginations, helping us to grasp the radical, outwardly focused nature of the Christian life. Our lives, our good works, are to be like pictures of God’s love that can be seen by all those who have not yet placed their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

*A site to check out*

You are probably familiar with the Real Clear Politics site, but you may not know there is a [Real Clear Religion](https://www.realclearreligion.org/) site (though what’s “clear” about any of this, I’m not sure.)

*Movie recommendation*

I imagine that all of us are trying to adjust to the sameness of every day, which makes today’s recommendation obvious: *Groundhog Day*, starring Bill Murray. I don’t know of any contemporary film that has gotten as much attention from theologians as this one. Try to watch it through Christ-shaped glasses.

*Book Recommendation*

Karen Tankersley sent me a recommendation: Erik Larsen’s new book, *The Splendid and the Vile*, about the London blitz in WWII and Churchill. I’ve read several of Larsen’s books -- all are excellent and readable. He has also written one on the hurricane that devastated Galveston and another on the sinking of the Lusitania.

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott