

*Salt and Light* – Matthew 5:13-20

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For travel, I don't fly very often. My work and vacationing and family time have never required it.

And in recent years, it's been even less. The last time I was on a plane was September of 2024 to be with my Mom who was in the hospital. It's just so infrequent for me.

I sympathize with folks who travel for work and must fly, as well as with folks who do quite a bit of flying for leisure travel.

Because, by all accounts, flying has become far less pleasurable than it used to be decades ago. The smaller seats and crowded airports and increased fees and security protocols have made it not something one looks forward to.

I read this week, though, that there is a segment of our population that, instead of loathing elements of flying, thrives on it. Three specific parts of it, actually:

First, there are flyers who actually enjoy turbulence when on a flight. Some people are soothed by ripples of light turbulence. It actually puts them asleep. Some flyers think it's fun to experience the roller coaster effect that comes when the plane goes up and down.

It's just like the motion of a boat rocked by waves, said one guy, who's loved the weather since he was a kid. He was once on a turbulent flight with his mom, who did not appreciate the bumpiness. He said he tried to calm her down with some cheerful discourse on science. And his mother told him to shut up.

Then there are those flyers who actually like sitting in the middle seat of a row. Can you believe this?

One person described it like “a midair cuddle that you don’t deserve, but you are privileged to have.” Another called it “a Zen-like practice. Master the middle seat and nothing will master you.” Some cope with the middle seat by striking up conversations with the people who flank them. In the middle seat, you hold sway over the vibe of the entire row. Embrace it.

And then there’s the people who actually enjoy airline food, what little there is of it anymore. They like the predictability of it, they say, not having to make a decision over what they’ll eat. It’s just plopped down in front of you. And, in their glass half-full mentality, they figure the only place they will ever eat that little piece of lasagna, tiny salad, and cold dinner roll is on an airplane. So, they embrace the opportunity.

These people are, in some strange way, the salt of the earth. They’re never going to fall prey to the grouchiness that comes with travelling. They’re not going to be anxious, belligerent, or defeated. They’ve embraced an outlook that says they’re not only going to make the most of a challenging situation, they’re going to thrive in it.

Jesus uses the terms “salt of the earth” and “light of the world,” to define those he believes act righteously. And he was a big fan of people who acted righteously, who did the right thing. He goes out of his way to say that while he came into the world to fulfill the Law, he did not come to abolish the Law. And the law was a set of behaviors that, when enacted, triggered righteousness or right living.

And it was so important to Jesus that he closes this section of his Sermon on the Mount by saying, “Unless your righteousness

exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Being salt and light—acting righteously—is our calling. And while we might not be on board with loving airplane turbulence, or the middle seat, or airline food, we can be salt and light in a whole host of ways.

The easiest way we can do that today is how we treat each other in light of the turbulent times in which we live, this large and growing divide that exists politically and ideologically within the country. My sense is that most of us are tired of it. Most of us are tired of being pitted against our neighbors. Most of us hunger to be brought together—to be pulled together rather than be pulled apart. We want to see each other as neighbors rather than as enemies.

Being salt and light means doing the work to get us there, recognizing, in our case, what in the church unites us and focusing on the ways we can share in that unifying force. Our God in Jesus Christ shows us immense grace. In response, let’s be salt and light toward each other. Let’s be kind, let’s grow in faith together despite whatever differences we have in politics or social issues. Let’s be a model for how left and right, liberal and conservative can live together with a common mission. Our common call is bigger than what makes us different.

Thomas Houlihan’s leaving for service in the U.S. Air Forces reminds us that our military is maybe the best of example of this. It’s an incredibly diverse organization, but everyone who’s a part of it answers to — and embraces — just one identity: “American.” And with that common identity, they’re able to put all those differences aside to defend the nation.

We in the church can defend the cause of Christ when we embrace our differences but not let them deter us from our mission—to love God and love our neighbor, to be the salt of the earth and light of world.