I'm only going to deal…
With the first half…
Of the gospel lesson…
Today.

Because the two pieces…
Don't necessarily go together…
As far as theme or meaning.

So… only verse 13-16 of Matthew 5.
Because that's enough…
For one day.

So it's interesting to me…
That when I researched…
And read the commentaries…
Compared the Greek…
And did all the normal sermon prep stuff…

It's interesting that people…
Try to explain the meaning…
Of this text…
By focusing…
On the attributes…
Of salt or light. [1 Salt and Light]

So… they say things like…

Salt enhances flavor…
So we ought to be flavorful Christians.
I don't know that means.

Salt makes you thirsty…
So we ought to make the world thirsty…
For Jesus.
I don't get it.

Salt preserves…
So we ought to preserve something…
Or God preserves us…
Or I don't know.

Then they explain light…
That we ought to be light…
Because…
Light invades darkness…
And makes darkness flee

Light exposes flaws…
And we should hold people accountable…
And expose their flaws…

Light gives us hope… and calms fears…
And our proclamation of Christ…
Gives hope… and calms fears…
Which is true… but…

But every single sermon…
Or outline…
Or illustration…
That I came across…
Seemed so forced.

Like the gospel lesson…
Didn’t really say…
What the people wanted it to say…

So they worked it…
And manipulated it…
And looked for connections…
Until they could make it fit.

I didn’t like it.

Have you ever seen this word before. [2 KISS]
What does it mean?
How about as an acronym…
Anyone know what these initials…
Stand for???

KISS is an acronym…
For "Keep it simple, sweetheart"… [3 Keep It Simple Sweetheart]
It was a design principle…
Noted by the U.S. Navy in 1960.

The KISS principle states…
That most systems work best…
If they are kept simple…
Rather than made complicated;

Therefore simplicity…
Should be a key goal in design…
And unnecessary complexity…
Should be avoided.
The acronym was coined by Kelly Johnson,  
The lead engineer…  
At the Lockheed Skunk Works…  
The unit that created the Lockheed U-2…  
And SR-71 Blackbird spy planes…

The story goes…  
That Johnson handed his team…  
Of design engineers…  
A handful of tools…

With the challenge…  
That the jet aircraft they were designing…  
Must be repairable…

By an average mechanic…  
In the field…  
Under combat conditions…  
With only the simple limited tools…  
He provided.

Simplicity was the goal.

Same with this gospel lesson…  
It’s not that complicated.  
We shouldn’t try to read more into…  
What Jesus said…  
Than what’s really there.

There are two common elements… [4 Salt and Light]  
That he uses…  
To compare…  
To the people…  
Who choose to follow him.

Salt.  
Light.

And we can try to make up…  
All kinds of meanings…  
Behind what Jesus was trying to say…  
About those elements…  
And who we are supposed to be.

But I’m pretty sure…  
That defeats…  
The purpose of his teaching.

If we Keep It Simple…
Then we can assume…
There’s something about…
These two separate elements…
That are common to both.

I think I know what it is.
Get ready.
It's super profound.

They both make things better.

What does salt do?
Salt makes things taste better.
I am a person who loves salt.

If you give me a choice…
Between some ooey-gooey sweet treat…
Like a cinnamon roll…
Or fresh baked cookies…
Or a whole box of Little Debbie Swiss Cakes.

Even though those all…
Are things that I like…

If you put them right in front of me…
Along side… a big old pile of Buffalo Wings…
Or Pizza with Meat… Meatza…
Or a jar of salty olives…
Or even a tin can of sardines…

I would choose the salt…
Over the sweet.
Every single time.

Because I like salt.
Salt tastes good.

And honestly…
When we add salt to our food…
Even though it’s not necessarily healthy…
For each and every one of us…
Salt generally makes things taste better.

And light…
Light does the exact same thing…
Light makes life better.

So the guy we bought our house from…
Was a gadget and gizmo guy…
We have three rooms at our house…
That have those automatic motion sensors…
Built into the light switches…

When we first moved into the house…
I didn’t like them…
They freaked me out…

One night…
Back when I was single…
I was living here in Colorado…
And my wife was living in Wisconsin…
I was sleeping soundly….
In the middle of the night…

When all the sudden…
The closet light…
In the bedroom…
Turned on.

And when you’re half asleep…
Your mind runs wild…
I remember thinking…

Did someone break into the house…
And hide in the closet…

Was there some kind of exotic and wild…
Colorado Animal lurking in the closet…
Like a bear…
Or a mountain lion…
Or a big horn sheep…

Was a ghost…
Coming out…
To haunt me…
In the dead of the night…

That’s where my mind went…
So you know what I did…
In my irrational state of half-sleep…

I got out of bed…
Turned on the tv…
And all the lamps…
Switched on the bedroom lights…
Walked completely through…
The entire house…
Even the basement…
Flipped on every light switch…
And looked in every dark place.

There was nothing.
There was nothing wrong.
No robber.
No murderer.
No animal.
No ghost.

I'm sure… it was a matter of…
Something slightly shifty…
In that closet…
Which activated the light…

But it made me feel better…
To banish the darkness…
Shine the light…
And to see for myself…
That there was nothing wrong…
There was nothing to fear.

Light makes things better.

And that's it.
To me… the meaning of this text…
Is that Jesus is comparing us…
To things that make life better…

And Jesus is calling us…
To make this world…
The place in which we live…
Better.

Pure and simple.
To not be a problem.
To not be a source…
Of anger… or hate… or disruption…
To not rejoice when things go wrong…
But to work hard to make things right.

Jesus is saying…
Make it better…
If you're following me…
If you love me…
If you want to do God’s will…

Then be a source…
Of goodness…
A goodness that overcomes…
The darkness…

Jesus said…

Let your light so shine…
Before others…
That they can see…
Your good works…
And give glory…
To your Father in heaven.

This is not hard.
It’s not deep.
It’s not the most impressive teaching…
That Jesus rolled out of the box…
It’s just simple.
And true.

God wants us…
To do good…
And to make this world…
A better place.

And the reason is…
Our God is good.
Our God is light.
And in God there is…
No darkness at all.

So. Do you remember…
When we celebrated the Epiphany… on Jan 6th???
And I brought a King Cake… [5 King Cake]
For the children’s sermon.

And of course… you remember…
The King Cake celebrated the arrival…
Of the Magi… the Wise men…
Who came to see the Christ Child.

And remember…
How inside the cake…
There was a little plastic baby Jesus…

And the person who finds…
The little plastic baby Jesus… [6 King Cake with Arrows]
Inside their piece of cake…
Has good luck…
For the next year…
Remember all that???
Well... that's not the whole story.
There's more to it...
Something else...
A little trick.

The person who finds the baby...
Is also obligated...
To provide food...
On the next big celebration...
Which is Candlemas. [7 Candlemas]

Candlemas marks the end...
Of the Christmas season...
It is 40 days AFTER Christmas Eve.

Candlemas commemorates...
The Presentation of Jesus... in the Temple...
And the Rite of Purification...

Candlemas is celebrated...
On February 2nd...
Every year.

So this... past... Thursday.

Ok... here’s the good the part.
After Epiphany...
I received an email...
From Kristy Proctor...
Telling me...
That her daughter...

Claudia... one of our confirmation students...
FOUND THE BABY JESUS!
And was very excited.

And I wrote back...
And said... that's great!
But... there’s more to it!

I explained...
That it was a tradition...
That whoever finds...
The baby...
Has to provide food...
On Candlemas.

And in particular... tamales... [8 Tamales]
And that was that.
A good laugh was had by all.
And it was completely forgotten…
Until this past week.

When I found out that Claudia… [9 Proctor 1]
And her softball team…
Had gotten together…
One night…

With a friend of their family… [10 Proctor 2]
Who knew how to make tamales…

And Ms. Claudia Proctor…
One of our confirmation students…
And her very good friends…
Made over 150 tamales…
Which is not an easy task…

And then…
And then…
You ready?…

On Thursday night…
On Candlemas…

They took the tamales…
And fed the women and children…
Who stayed in our church…
And all the volunteers…
Who helped with…
The Winter Shelter Network.

Jesus said… [11 Let Your Light So Shine]
Let your light…
So shine…
Before others…
That they see your good works…
And give glory…
To your Father in heaven.

We know…
Through Jesus…
What God wants us to do.

God wants us to love God.
And to love each other.
That's the light.
That's the light…
That has come into the world…

That's the light…
That shines…
Through 150 tamales.

That's the light…
That shines…
With every good…
That is done in the name of Christ…
And to the glory of God.

That's the light…
That shines…
When we work together…
To make good things happen.

That's the light of Christ.
And our goal as followers of Christ…
Is “To shine in dark places.”

So… listen…
I'm asking you…
To take this personally.

Don't think in the abstract.
Make it real.
Make it honest.
Make simple.

And I'll do the same.
But we can start…
By asking ourselves…
This one simple question.

What are you going to do…
To make this world…
Better?

It doesn't have to be profound…
It doesn't have to change everything…
It doesn't have to be as significant…
As a cure for cancer.

It can be simple.
As a matter of fact…
I really believe…
In our world today…
It's more important than ever…
To try our best…
To make things good…
And holy…
And right…

To center on the love of God…
Which leads directly…
To the love of neighbor…

And just to make that love…
And kindness…
And grace…
And goodness…
A normal and automatic part of our lives.

To choose…
To hold our anger.
And our opinions…
And our need to feel important…
And knowledgable…
And right…

To hold those things back…

And to sacrifice…
Those negative hurtful things…
On the altar of love…
For the sake of Jesus Christ.

To show the world…
That we are not of this world.
That we will not participate in darkness…
That destroys…
And leads to death…

That we will not live…
The same way…
That the world…
Calls us to live.

We will be different.
We will be stronger.
We will be love.

And we will…
By the love of God…
And the power of the Holy Spirit…
We will…
Make this world.
Better.