

## HOPE FOUND IN COMMUNITY: Rev. Michael Ward

### Matthew 5:13–20

Hello, and welcome to this fifth message in our 2026 Epiphany Series, *Manifesting Hope in Darkness*. Today our theme is *Hope Found in Community*.

Most of you won't know me. My name is Michael Ward, a retired United Church of Canada pastor currently serving Christ Moravian Church in Calgary as interim pastor.

Today's Gospel picks up right where we left off last week. Jesus has just proclaimed the Beatitudes - those surprising blessings that describe the character of God's Kingdom or Reign. They paint a picture of what a Jesus-shaped life looks like. And immediately after blessing His followers, Jesus turns from blessing to identity. He looks at this ordinary crowd - fishermen, farmers, mothers, labourers, the weary and the hopeful - and He says:

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

Not a list of ideals to strive for, but a way of being in the world that reveals God's presence and purpose.

Jesus begins with salt. And He speaks in terms of how He already sees us.

He doesn't say, “Go be salty.” He says, **“You are salt.”**

In the ancient world, salt wasn't the pure white table salt we know today. It was mined - full of minerals and attached trace elements that gave each grain its own texture and taste. Every handful was different. And no single grain changed anything on its own. It was the *collective* that seasoned.

Salt works by drawing out what is already present. It awakens flavours hidden within the food - makes it richer, more savoury.

And Jesus says: **That's you.**

Your calling is not to impose something on the world. Your calling is to draw out the God-given goodness already embedded in others and in creation.

When you listen deeply to someone who feels unseen... When you encourage another gently... When you stand with someone in their pain... When you help someone notice the grace already at work in their life...

You are bringing out God-flavours. You are awakening what God has already placed there.

Then Jesus shifts the image:

**“You are the light of the world.”**

Light doesn't create what it reveals. It simply makes visible what darkness hides.

And here's something beautiful: white light is not one colour. It is the blending of many wavelengths - many colours.

Likewise, the church's witness is communal. Diverse gifts, personalities, and stories forming one radiant presence.

Light is not meant to be admired. Light is meant to help others see.

When you act with compassion... When you speak truth with gentleness... When you choose justice over convenience... When you forgive when it would be easier to hold a grudge...

You illuminate possibilities others couldn't see. Your life becomes a window through which God's grace is glimpsed.

It's important to notice that Jesus speaks to the crowd. The "you" is plural.

**You all** are the salt. **You all** are the light.

Salt works in combination. Light shines in spectrum.

A single grain of salt is tasteless. A single colour band is limited.

But together? Together they transform the environment.

The church's witness is strongest when we blend our strengths and weaknesses, our stories and scars. We don't have to be everything. We simply bring our part. God uses the whole community to season and illuminate the world.

### **Salt and Light Fulfill Their Purpose by Giving Themselves Away**

Salt does its work quietly. It dissolves into the food and disappears, yet its presence is unmistakable in the flavour it brings out. Light works the same way. We don't admire light for its own sake - we value it because it helps us see what is really there. Its purpose is fulfilled when it reveals what would otherwise remain hidden.

In the same way, Kingdom influence is not about being noticed. It's not about drawing attention to ourselves. It's about the quiet, steady transformation that happens when God's love works through us. When we offer kindness without needing credit... when we serve without applause... when we forgive without fanfare... we are giving ourselves away in love. And in that giving, we become most fully who Christ says we already are.

Salt disappears into the meal. Light gives itself to the room. And disciples of Jesus give themselves to the world - not to be recognized, but so that others might taste grace and see hope.

Quiet acts of kindness. Faithful presence in difficult places. Courageous truth spoken gently. Forgiveness offered freely. Hope held on behalf of someone who can't hold it for themselves.

These are the ways we “lose ourselves” and yet become who we truly are in Christ.

I believe Eugene Peterson captures the heart of Jesus’ words in his paraphrase of the Bible - *The Message*:

**“Bring out the God-flavours of the earth.” “Bring out the God-colours in the world.”**

God has already seeded the world with goodness, beauty, and possibility. Our calling is to help reveal it - to help others taste and see the goodness of God.

Salt and light are not about superiority. They are about service. They are not about drawing attention to ourselves. They are about drawing attention to God’s presence already shimmering beneath the surface of things.

So hear this good news:

**You are already salt. You are already light.**

Not because of your perfection, but because Christ has named you so.

Go into your homes, your workplaces, your neighbourhoods with confidence - drawing out God-flavours, revealing God-colours, trusting that God uses ordinary people - people like you and me - to season and illuminate the world.

May we live in such a way that others taste grace, see hope, and glimpse the God who is already at work in every corner of creation. **Amen.**