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“You are the salt of the earth ... You are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:13-14).

1 Kgs 17:7-16; Matt 5:13-16

It is understandable that believers today sometimes imagine that if they had lived at the time of Jesus, they would have witnessed astonishing things that would make it so much easier for them to believe. Cripples and lepers healed, the dead raised, thousands feasting on bread and fish in the wilderness, crowds held spellbound as Jesus preached.

Yet, if we could go back to those golden days, we would perhaps have heard people wishing *they* had lived in the time of the great prophets, Elijah and Elisha, who did such spectacular miracles, calling down fire, raising the dead, controlling the weather. Today’s first reading from 1 Kings makes for thrilling reading as Elijah creates a bottomless jar of flour and jug of oil for the widow in Sidon during a famine God had told him to initiate. The stories still to come in this week’s readings would make today’s superhero epics pale by comparison.

The Gospel writers consciously depicted Jesus doing what Elijah and Elisha, or Moses, did to show that he fulfilled the Law and the Prophets, because, by then, after his death and resurrection, they believed he was the Son of God. But, if all we found in the Gospels were the words of Jesus without the inspiring narratives of his powerful deeds, we would believe in him not for his miracles, but because he challenged us to develop ordinary, long-term patterns of love and service in our lives that would change the world.

This is what he said: "You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world." This is slow walking discipleship, quiet preaching and hidden fidelity that add up to the witness that God is present in the world. Our behavior will show that grace is connecting the dots of ordinary goodness as the unmistakable signal to people who want holiness for its own sake, not as spectacle.

Salt seasons life by disappearing into a meal among friends, enhancing the joy of being together, celebrating the common hungers that draw us into mutual dependency and caring. Light brings clarity to thought, pushes back the shadows and fears of the night, enables us to find our way through the gloom and doubt that assail everyone. Those who bring salt and light are miracle workers, prophets, models of confidence and comfort to others in times of uncertainty and trouble. Jesus calls ordinary heroes, unassuming saints, quiet catalysts to build communities by being available to the needs of others.

This is the life Jesus lived and the one he invites us to share. Trained in the Beatitudes, we may never work miracles or lead the parade or be recognized as significant or special. But God knows and loves the meek, the sorrowful, the merciful, the pure of heart, the peacemakers, the seekers of justice, the persecuted. From them God sometimes chooses martyrs and saints to inspire us, but it always takes all of us together to summon God's will to earth as it is in heaven.

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