

Head of Christiana Presbyterian Church  
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Newark, Delaware  
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## **“Flavor all. Enlighten the World”**

Psalm 112:1-10

Matthew 5:13–20

You are the salt of the earth.  
You are the light of the world.

That describes Head of Christiana Presbyterian Church.  
That’s the members of Head of Christiana.  
Salt. Light.

I like to think that this church I serve is described by those words.  
I like to think that those words of Jesus are a concise mission  
statement for you and me, and for anyone who is motivated by  
Jesus and wants to live following Jesus.  
**Salt . . . light. Yes, that’s us!**

You are the salt of the earth.  
You are the light of the world.

An age-old question about religion is where and how our faith  
should be practiced.

One of the oldest heresies for Christians is the opinion that  
Christianity is so holy, so sacred, that it can’t be practiced in the  
world, which, after all, is not only rational and practical but also sinful  
and fallen.

So if you really want to live a Christian life, you have to find some  
place other than this world.

You have to retreat, withdraw from the world, perhaps to a  
community of likeminded people who agree ahead of time to  
follow the teachings of Jesus as fully and literally as  
possible...

That is, as literally and as fully as you do.

Sometimes Christians have lived this way successfully and admirably, in cloistered monasteries and convents.

Some early Christians fled to the desert to live solitary lives as hermits.

And more often, now in these most recent generations, Christians have retreated into a private space of personal spirituality, as separate as possible from the world and all that is worldly.

But it's hard to pull that off if you're going to continue living in the world, so you have to come up with a definition of worldly and a list of worldly activities to avoid.

Drinking and smoking have always been on that list; dancing, playing cards, going to movies, and sex are on the list.

Sex is so powerfully worldly that, though it is seldom spoken, it is always on the list: don't think about it, don't do it unless you absolutely have to, and for heaven's sake don't enjoy it.

William Sloane Coffin, a church leader from a previous generation, famously observed that he knew something was wrong with the churchly order of things when a little boy said to him,

**“Christianity is all the things you're not supposed to do.”**

You are the salt of the earth.  
You are the light of the world.

I don't believe I'm much different than anybody else, but I became a Christian not in a single dramatic conversion experience, but over the years, as a result of an extended process of learning, thinking, and observing. And over my early years I had a strong suspicion of the Christian way, because I was told with regularity that God didn't want me to do a lot of the things that I kind of enjoyed doing.

Rather, people suggested ... even insisted that God wanted me to read the Bible and pray a lot and think holy thoughts and most of all avoid doing all the things on the list of worldly activities that are sinful.

Frankly, I didn't spend a lot of time worrying about it that much, but in my early years I too often had the sense that loving the world too

much was dangerous, full of temptations of the flesh, enjoying the world and my life in it too much was dangerous to my health:

Much music/well, most popular music and most movies -- and Sunday baseball – such were to be avoided (so we surreptitiously played hooky from church one Sunday a year and drove to Philadelphia --my father and brother and I-- and to sit in old Shibe Park to watch a game and eat hot dogs. That was paradise. It was even better than Sunday School. A notion I don't believe my father totally agreed with for we never made this outing more than once a year,

Once, after the game, we sought-out the Horn and Hardart restaurant – the automat – and it was closed ... SUNDAY!  
NEVER ON SUNDAY.

Yes, conversions usually come slowly. Change of mind and heart comes slowly. For many years I continued to glance behind me to see whether my mother was watching while I waited in line for a ticket to a movie on Sunday.

But slowly, surely I came to realize how wrong what I was told about loving and enjoying this world is. Actually, the world is a beautiful and good place; that God made it and everything in it and called it good, including our minds and our creativity and human bodies.

**All good.**

My evolving conversion, my heart-felt change, recognized that living up to the brim, and enjoying this good world fully, is a way of praising God.

Enjoying being alive and reveling in God's world is a glorious expression for praising God.

Several weeks ago, early in the morning as I was driving west on Rt. 273 alongside the golf course ... and the early morning sun glistened on snow shrouded trees and branches, I was awed by the beauty before me.

Then last week those limbs were iced, bent and breaking in the wind. And across our community and up into Pennsylvania trees toppled and transformers exploded and too many were left

shivering and in darkness. (Certainly no beauty in that mess)

However, look more closely ... the beauty of God in all that are the ways neighbors reached out to neighbors ... strangers have assisted strangers. I've heard it in words such as these; "Please move your food into our refrigerator ... Another said, "I'll drive you for your appointment in my four wheel-drive truck ... Another said, "you can plug into our generator ... Another reported, "She chopped wood for me ...

Another, "I've eaten with them now for three meals...and I'm going over there tonight and we're going to eat and play cards ... and to think that I had seen them before but had never met them."

Yes, the beauty of God's creation is amazingly complex and grabs our attention in a wide variety of ways.

Such as in the beauty of God's creation seen in the incredibly intricate beauty of a flower, or a baby's sweet face—

I discover that I am sensing and praising God when I am astounded and moved by the discipline and harmony of skiers and skaters and singers ...

by a choir of harps and bells and song ... and Christmas in Candlelight and carol:

I am deeply moved by the physician who will not rest until a diagnosis is made ... and a surgeon who cuts precisely ...

and a nurse who attends with healing care.

Any one of those acts can send shivers of delight up and down my spine and a deep sense of God's goodness and the goodness of life in God's world.

Salt acts on its environment; changes, enlivens.

Savor God's world.

Light illumines, shines in the darkness.

My conversion, my growth in faith, continued when in Seminary I learned about Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a young German pastor and theologian.

He was a pacifist, who realized in the 1930s that his faith in Jesus Christ required him to give up the secure and cloistered life as a university academic ...

and plunge into the world and live in the world at its most worldly and complicated and dangerous.

Bonhoeffer joined the resistance and was part of a plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler.

When the effort failed, the participants were rounded up, arrested, put in a military prison, and eventually executed, including Bonhoeffer.

There is a book of letters he wrote while in that Nazi prison. The letter that captured my attention when I first read it, is dated July 21, 1944, a month and a half after the Normandy invasion.

It seems that Bonhoeffer had come to terms with the fact that he was never going to get out of prison alive. So Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote to a friend,

*During the past year or so I have come to appreciate the worldliness of Christianity as never before. I thought I could acquire faith by trying to live a holy life or something like it. Later I discovered and am still discovering up to this very moment that it is only by living completely in the world that one learns to believe. (Letters and Papers from Prison)*

You are the salt of the earth  
You are the light of the world  
Let your light shine

When people ask me about Head of Christiana Presbyterian Church, it seems they expect to hear about a slightly smug, introverted people, who are hard on pastors, and who enjoy perhaps a little too much our simply elegant sanctuary with lovely ceiling and stained glass windows, nestled in a cove down off of Nottingham Road. That has probably never been an accurate description of this place, but people have heard stories. People are genuinely surprised to learn (or to be reminded) that Head of Christiana was

among the founders of Meeting Ground, and led in the construction of the facilities at Clairvaux Farm (providing both person-power and funding)

And that Head of Christiana members and friends provide and serve meals at Hope Dining Room and Elkton Community Kitchen, and Saint Andrews Place in Wilmington...and participate in provide leadership for the Newark Empowerment Center and The Newark Welafe Committee. And we provide logistical support for the world famous Triple Crown Trail Race which has provided over \$20,000 per year over the past number of years to assist the homeless in Newark and Cecil County. And just last week ... After it was announced the preceding Sunday, A massive van load of good clothing was gathered to meet the emergency call for winter clothing sounded by Friendship House.

Yes, you are a people -- a congregation that understands deeply that exists not simply for our own members but for the community, the towns and city around us ... the world—

Head of Christiana ... a church that is the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

When you join this church, when you love it and support it with your prayers, when you invest your energy and skills, when you give your money, you are a part of all of that. You are Salt and Light.

There are times, I am certain, when we are not at all sure we have any light to shine, when we are feeling inadequate and without energy or resources or any particular ideas or skills.

I understand how we sometimes come to that conclusion, but I don't believe it is accurate.

I believe God gives each of us,

Light to shine .... Salt to enhance flavor.

Somehow, a gift, a skill maybe as modest as our ability to love a child, a neighbor, a stranger, but it is ours, our light that Jesus asks us to shine in the world for him. "You are the salt of the earth," Jesus says. You are the light of the world.

**So flavor all. Enlighten the World. Amen.**

