Have you ever wondered why you're here?
Like, why are you here, on this planet?
“Let me tell you why,” says Jesus at the beginning of today’s scripture passage in MSG version. The answer he gives is as broad as it is deep. He may not give us the specific instructions some of us may tend to long for—at least in certain situations. Yet, I believe the direction he does point may be helpful to many of us who ponder that question.

“You're here to be salt-seasoning,” Jesus teaches.

“You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth.”

I finally got to see Frozen 2 about a week ago.

Many of you know. It’s the Disney sequel to the original Frozen movie that came out this past November. In it Queen Elsa is on a path to find out the truth about her family’s past and, she hopes, to find the reason she was born with such magical powers.

In a climactic scene of the movie, Elsa, voiced by Broadway virtuoso Idina Menzel, sings, “Show Yourself” to a mysterious voice she has heard calling her throughout the movie.

In the third verse she stands in the middle of a glacier-filled cave and calls,

“I've never felt so certain. All my life I've been torn.
But I'm here for a reason could it be the reason I was born?”

What is the reason each of us were born?

“You're here to be salt-seasoning,” Jesus teaches.

“You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth.”

“Here’s another way to put it,” says Jesus. “ “You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world... [and] if I make you light-bearers, you don’t think I’m going to hide you under a bucket, do you? ...I’m putting you on a light stand. Now---shine!”

It’s not hard to see that each one of us is different from each other. It’s not hard to see that we bring different gifts, different experiences, and different perspectives.

The particular ways we are called to do it will be different from each other and may be different for each of us in different times of our lives.

Yet, Jesus teaches we are here to bring out the God-flavors of the earth.

We are here to bring out the God-colors of the world.
We are here to shine.
Now, shining may seem un-Brethren to those of us who listen carefully to Matthew 6:6’s teaching about not being showy with our faith life.

Shining may seem too much for those of us who are afraid we are not enough.
Shining may be misunderstood by those of us who try to make up for what we feel we lack by being the biggest bully in the room.

But none of that is what Jesus teaches here.

No, Jesus calls his followers not to hide their light. Jesus calls his followers not to lose their saltiness, which I figure can only really be done by spreading it out over too much water, food, ground, or time.

Notice being salt and being light are not specific actions. They are specific images for ways of being. Jesus calls his followers to simply be what God has made them to be.
In doing so, he says, we will bring out all those glorious God-colors and God-flavors of being alive on this earth.

To me, that sounds like an exciting purpose for being on this planet.

I remember though that in the verses just previous to this passage --in the scripture in fact that we read last week-- Jesus blesses the persecuted.
He tells his followers they can rejoice when they are hated and reviled, because that’s what humans have always done to those who bravely shine and speak the truth.

Those verses make it clear that shining will not always be easy. Shining will not always be met with approval. In fact, shining, as we truly are, may sometimes put us in the way of conflict and even violence.

Transwomen in my life all too often have had to face conflict and the threat of violence for the act of unabashedly shining.

We just passed Rosa Park’s birthday on February 4th.
She knew what kind of trouble can come from shining.

Our friends in the EYN church in Nigeria face a threat of violence that is hard for me to truly understand.

Yet, they shine, holding fast to their faith and to their own understanding of a faithful peace witness. Truthfully, it’s hard enough for me sometimes just to politely disagree with someone.

But I’m challenging myself to learn to do so better.

--Particularly when it comes to my growing understanding of racism.

One guide for me in this work has been a white woman named Frances Kendall
who wrote the book *Understanding White Privilege*.

In this book she takes a comprehensive look at racism, whiteness, and what white people can do.

She also writes honestly about the struggles in her personal relationships with her own white family and friends.

She writes about learning how to respectfully stand her ground.

She writes about the heartache of relationships that will never be the same since she decided not to be silent on issues of race.

Her book helped me think more clearly about all of us who find ourselves in places of conflict.

It’s not always easy to be the person who upsets the status quo.

But I appreciated her reminder to herself that sharing her perspective is not what has broken those relationships down.

Racism is what has done that.

What’s done that is racism and its close cousin the inability to navigate conflict without trying to hide someone’s light or take the flavor out of our saltiness.

It’s not worth it not to be who we are to avoid conflict and persecution.

It will not give us everything we need in the long run.

It will not offer the safety, healing, or wholeness we seek.

We only get so much time to breathe on this planet. Conflict will come our way when it chooses.

We might as well take courage, do what we can, and shine.

When we do, we may just find our shining brings out those God-colors in the world all around us.

Now, Sometimes shining like that may mean doing things a little differently than they have been done before.

But I hear in Jesus’ teaching today that doing our best to be salt-seasoning in the particular time we are in is the best thing we can do to honor the best parts of what has come before.

I hear this wisdom in Jesus’ own claim that he has not come to demolish the teachings of the scripture but to complete them.

Indeed, that’s what we’ll hear Jesus doing throughout Matthew and in the other gospels too.

He’s standing firm in his own God-given color and flavor, interpreting the scriptures through the lens of God’s love that he so fully embodies.

Perhaps for all the hearers of his message that does mean change. But it’s a change that calls hearers then and now back to our rootedness in a love for God, neighbor, and self.
upon which Jesus teaches later in Matthew (22: 34) we may hang all the teachings that have come before.

In the movie Frozen 2, magical snowman Olaf returns with all his charm, wit, and wisdom. In this sequel story, Olaf is obsessed not with seeing the legendary season of Summer but with what happens when life’s seasons change.

In the midst of a scary change for him, he shares with his dear friend Ana that he has thought of one thing that doesn’t change: love.

Throughout our lives, our relationships may change. We may change.

Our understandings of God may change.

Our health, our wealth, and all the expectations we ever had may indeed change.

Through it all, God, that source from whom all love flows, remains steadfast and allows us to grow all the time into just exactly who we are.

At our best, a church is a community that brings out the taste of that love in this life.

Sometimes we, the church, together and as individuals can get wrapped up in thinking our rule following or our good deeds or our right understanding will allow us to taste all the God-flavors of this life.

We end up indeed trying to outdo the ancient Pharisees in thinking that those things will save us. But I don’t think that’s the kind of right-living to which Jesus calls us in the last part of the verses we read today.

I don’t hear Jesus calling us to try harder and do more.

I hear Jesus teaching that we are the salt for the earth.

Yes, God’s law will be alive and working long after the stars burn out and the earth wears out. But that law is written in love on our hearts just as surely as it is written in the lights that sparkle across the night sky.

We can always keep growing but we don’t need to beat ourselves up, make ourselves small, or pretend to be anything we’re not.

We can be salt for the earth in being unabashedly the beautiful, talented, wart-covered, stumbling, and soaring human beings we really are in whatever particular moment we find ourselves.

We can do that here in church and out in the world.

It takes practice sometimes, but all it really requires is accepting the blessing of being alive and being made in the beloved image of God.

The easiest water to float in is the ocean because it’s full of salt.
I tried and tried and tried to learn to float, but I found it incredibly difficult until my younger brother-in-law told me with confidence from the edge of the pool, “It’s easy. You just lay back on the water and let it hold you up.”

That’s what we were born to do. We were born to be salt. We were born to shine. We were born to float.

Whatever the waves of life bring your way,

I pray you will find your own way of floating this season and that it will be like a welcome breath of fresh air.

May it be so. Amen.