

Good morning. Leo grew up in a small town like Ritzville, he raced down the road with his bike, like the boys and girls in Ritzville, he went to the store to buy candy, like the kids in Ritzville. But all was not happy in Leo's family. Leo's father always said, "Leo, you good for nothing...you'll never amount to anything!"

When he got last in the race at track and field, or when he broke his arm while playing baseball, he said to the rest of the kids, *"I'm not very good at this. My dad says I'll never amount to anything."*

Even the neighbours would occasionally hear Leo's dad shouting *"Don't you know anything? You'll never amount to anything!"*

And you know something? Leo felt like he never did amount to anything. The voice of Leo's father was so loud, so overwhelming and buried so deep in Leo's psyche that there was no way Leo could overcome the handicap. And, as a result, he spent the rest of his life hurting himself and other people – and spent his time in and out of jail.

You know a Leo or two – don't you? They may not be in jail – but there are a few Leos around us. As a matter of fact, there may be a few people here today who have a voice like the voice of Leo's father somewhere inside. Maybe it isn't as strong as the voice that Leo had to contend with, but so many of us must deal with those inner insults, *"You're not adequate. You don't measure up. Better let someone else try that."*

One thing I firmly believe is so important for all of us is to replace those inner insults with words of appreciation and love. What a powerful difference it makes in our lives when we have been nourished with messages like, *"You are wonderful! Good job! I love you! It's ok lose – I like it when you try hard! You are so kind, generous, smart..."* The language we hear in our head is the language we hear most often. If you're like me, sometimes reminders help to transform our inner voice. Some people use sticky-notes, I like to stick "I am/want to be" statements on my mirror so that every time I look in the mirror, I am reminded about who I really am in the eyes of God.

It's a good idea – why not try it too.

Jesus has just concluded the Beatitudes and then makes an amazing series of statements. He moves from blessing God's people and assuring them of a new kingdom – to instructions on how to live in the kingdom and in the world. Note, I didn't say in the Kingdom and NOT in the world. These are instructions on how to *live in relationship with* the world. God designed us for relationships – with God and with the people around us.

Today's scripture focuses on God's view of who we are – in terms of who Jesus says we ought to be in our relationship with God, with family and friends, and with our world. As we read this together, note the positive statements.

Matthew 5:13-16

¹³ You are the salt of the earth;
but if salt has lost its taste,
how can its saltiness be restored?

It is no longer good for anything,
but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

¹⁴ You are the light of the world.
A city built on a hill cannot be hid.
¹⁵ No one after lighting a lamp
puts it under the bushel basket,
but on the lampstand,
and it gives light to all in the house.

¹⁶ In the same way,
let your light shine before others,
so that they may see your good works
and give glory to your Father in heaven.

What a powerful thing for God to say about who we are! These were astonishing statements to make – especially in Jesus’ day.

Salt was so valuable in the ancient world, that the Greeks called it divine. A Latin catch phrase: *“Nil utilius sole et sale.”* “There is nothing more useful than sun and salt.” There were times when Roman soldiers received their wages in salt... In fact, the Latin word for salt is the root word of salary.

It is hard for us to understand the amazing value of salt in the ancient world.

Likewise, it is hard for us to understand how salt could lose its saltiness. When researching this, I came across some interesting trivia. Most of Israel’s salt supply came from the Dead Sea but because of its impurities; it could easily lose its taste. This salt was also a highly traded commodity, and it wasn’t unusual for dubious traders to mix it with white sand in bulk sales. This unscrupulous trader is the origin behind the saying, “she’s not worth her salt,”

So, we know that salt was important. But why? Salt was and sometimes still is used – as a meat preservative – before refrigeration – Salt pork and the like. You need salt for canning – pickles and such.

I’ve used salt when gargling. It’s helped me to preserve my tonsils - but I’ve soaked cuts on my feet with salt water (and how it burns) ... From this we get the saying “Its like rubbing salt into the wound.” It’ll make it better, but it hurts like crazy.

Salt is also a flavour enhancer to add to our chicken noodle soup so that it tastes like something. My dad and sister are known to forget salt with their cooking. I’ve had chicken noodle soup without salt. That tastes like yellow water with noodles.

We don’t need a lot to make things tasty. But too much salt is overwhelming – and the food quickly loses its flavour – as well as any other food you might taste in the next 3 minutes.

Salt is meant to be tasted and used. The purpose of salt is to be salty. One doesn’t need a lot of salt to

get things right.

Now, in almost the same breath, Jesus talks about light.
What's so important about light?

I have several memories of light. I can remember during my first summer in rural Saskatchewan – a place similarly rural to here.

I was coming home from watching a movie at the drive-in theatre and got utterly lost in the darkness of the prairie sky.

Prior to pastoring, I had only ever lived in areas of the world that were FLOODED with light: Houses, street-lights – and even where we lived outside of town there were the lights reflecting on the low clouds from the greenhouses growing tomatoes, cucumbers, and peppers.

My first summer here, way back in 2019, I went with friends to a concert in Moses Lake. Now, I wasn't driving the vehicle this time, but even though we came home via Road 3 and Rosenoff road, I still was not yet familiar with all the hills and coolies and potato barns. On the crest of the edge of the coolie into Kageleville the lights of the church became visible over the many miles and miles of darkness. Even though I trusted the driver and her ability to get me home safely, just the sight of home calmed my anxious heart.

A church with outdoor lights and 2 shining streetlights built on a hill cannot be hidden.

I cannot imagine the darkness of night where no one has electric lights...

I cannot imagine how vast and dark the night is when the moon is gone, and the stars are shrouded by clouds.

Even the merest candle can light the way. And in a dark cold room, or car stranded in a snowbank – a lit candle brings light, warmth and hope. Who would ever hide it?

Light's function is to give light – to be seen and to be felt and to be reflected.

This past week I endeavoured to read a fairly archaic book about the Sermon on the Mount. Sometimes these books can be treasures, and sometimes you have to find treasures hidden within the texts. This is the case of the latter

In it I read that God calls those in the kingdom of God to contrast with the world – instead of being bland – be full of flavour, - instead of rotten – be preserved, instead of infected – be purified. Similarly, instead of living in darkness – living in the light. Instead of being gloomy – be warm, instead of being confused and lost – be one who brings clarity.

The church - for that is what I will call those who are in the Kingdom of God – the Church is called to be a contrasting agent in the world.

Note, I say **IN** the world. We are not to be hidden under a bushel basket, but are to let our light shine before others so that all can see the beautiful rays of Gods light and laugh and rejoice in that light.

Pause

Yet I still wonder. Why would Jesus use salt and light – and why are they in this order? Remember when I said, the characteristic of salt is to BE salty?

As part of God's kingdom, we are to first **be**. To live our faith – to become who we are in God...we are called to **be** full of flavour and **be** good for something. I like to think that this means we ought to be spicy and memorable and oh so delicious so that people will come to us and say, how can we become tasty like you? Hm?

Light, on the other hand...Light's function is to **GIVE** light. To emit powerful radiance out to the world. We are called to **BE** before we are called to **GIVE**. The house has got to be there before you turn the lights on. These two go together. What would it have been like if we had run out of gas on the way back to Menno and found that the light I thought was Kageleville just lit a farmyard with no house?

What if we were all talk and no substance? What if we had an amazing outreach mission with those who are living in darkness on the streets in Spokane, Moses Lake, Ritzville...and on Sundays when the church was packed, all we did was say, "God bless you, live in peace" and send the people away hungry for food, friendship, and justice. That's what light without salt looks like.

Through works of love we become visible for all to see. Jesus' followers are to bear witness to the power of God's love in their lives. Salt and Light – these two go together.

We are claimed by God. When you and I grasp deep within what God says about who we are, amazing things begin to happen in our life of faith.

Last week we heard words of blessing and encouragement. Today Jesus words to us are words of empowerment. "You are!" instead of "You'll never!" and "Let your light shine so that all can see!" instead of "Better let someone else do that."

Jesus said these words to the crowds around him – the scholarly, Pharisees and scribes AND the widows and orphans and farmers and slaves and masters...to the oppressed and to the oppressors.

Jesus has challenged all of us with these words – the educated and the not educated, the public speakers and those who only speak in private. All of us are called to BE and GIVE. We are ALL somebody in God's plan.

Have you ever really come to terms with God's view of who you are? No matter what any other voice has ever said to you – this is the only voice that really, truly counts. It is the voice of God saying:
"You are!"

May God give us the grace and joy of knowing who we are in the eyes of Christ and make us more fully into who we are as beings and givers of Gods love for the sake of the kingdom.