

## “Salt and light”

1 Corinthians 2:1-5; Matthew 5:13-20  
(February 5, 2023)

One of my favourite views of the city of Saskatoon is the one you get at night, driving in from the east on Highway #5. You drop down over a hill and there you see it: First a glow on the horizon. And then a thousand city lights spread out before you. Streetlights, businesses, subdivisions. A variety of colours at Christmas. It’s like landing in a plane, descending into this sea of lights.



Photo by Eyalasaf,  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:כל\\_הכפר\\_-\\_כפר\\_יונה\\_בלילה\\_ממבט\\_הרחוק.קל\\_הכפר](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:כל_הכפר_-_כפר_יונה_בלילה_ממבט_הרחוק.קל_הכפר)  
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“A city set on a hill cannot be hid,” said Jesus. But even a city set on the open prairie has the ability to illuminate the sky and countryside around it in beautiful ways.

“Let your light shine,” Jesus says. And “let your salt be salty.”

Salt and light. Two things we encounter each and every day. The sun rises in the morning, sheds its light upon the earth and the day begins. We eat our breakfast, and chances are something of what we eat (if not for breakfast, then certainly before the day is over) will be seasoned with salt.



Salt and light. “You are the salt of the earth,” says Jesus. “You are the light of the world.”

*You* are. Did you hear that? Jesus tells us who we are. And he’s not using any of the usual markers of identity: Name? Address? Social Insurance Number? Occupation? But who are you *really*? “You are salt,” says Jesus. “You are light.”

I should note that Jesus isn’t speaking just to me. He’s speaking to *all* of us together. In the Greek text, the verb is plural. Everyone who’s set themselves down to listen to Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount ... all these fledgling disciples of Jesus, including us, he calls salt and light.

Not “we *should* be salt and light,” we ought to be, we have to try harder to be. No. Jesus says we already are.

“You want to follow me? Great. Let your saltiness come out. Let that light that’s shining really shine! It’s not a Herculean effort. It’s just being authentically who God has made us to be.



And it may surprise us to see who is salt and light right there beside us. Who’s in the crowd with Jesus? Imagine yourself there, as he preaches. Look around. It’s the same crowd who has just received his blessing.

Last week we read the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, the beatitudes. Jesus blesses those who are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who are meek, the peacemakers, the ones who hunger and thirst for justice, the persecuted.

They're not necessarily the elite of the world. They're very much the last and the least. The unloved and forgotten. The outcast and misfit and the disreputable.

But they're also salt and light, he says. And they have a very *important* part to play in the kingdom of heaven. "You are worthwhile, you are treasured. You are salt of the earth. The world may not think much of you, but I do!"

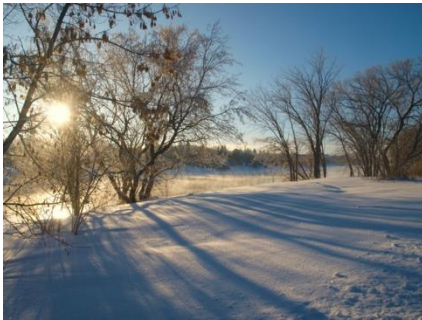
Pause right there, and allow that to sink in. Jesus thinks your life matters!



Sermon on the Mount, by Carl Heinrich Bloch, 1834-1890.



Salt and light are earthy things. An integral part of God's creation, just as everything else in the world around us. And we are too. The thing about salt and light is the great blessing they bring when they interact with all these other things.



Look at the light in this photograph. I think the most beautiful light arrives about an hour after sunrise, or an hour before the sun sets at night.

I enjoy photography, and I love the rich colour of that light. I love the interplay between long shadows and the way the sun lights up any object in its path. It's not harsh or glaring light. It's soft and lovely and makes everything it touches beautiful.

In the same way, just the right amount of salt added at a certain stage in cooking, brings tenderness and exquisite flavour. It takes a proper cook to know these things: just when to salt and how much of it.

That knowledge comes though experience – recipes take time to be perfected, and I claim no expertise in that. But I do know when something tastes delicious.



Salt and light are important because they interact with many things, to make them better – more beautiful, more flavourful. More gorgeous, more delectable.

Salt and light don't exist to bring attention to *themselves*. We'd never pour ourselves an entire bowl of salt to eat. We'd never stare for hours at a light-bulb, thinking it was beautiful. We too, as salt and light, are intended to *interact* with the world in a way that brings out the good in it. A way that makes the world a better place.

Salty people see the good in others, and encourage more of it. People who let their light shine cause others around them to be bright and glorious too. You *can* see the light in others, can't you?





The Creation of Adam, by Michelangelo, 1475-1564

You know that every one of us is made in the image of God. When God made the world, God took it all in, and called it very good.

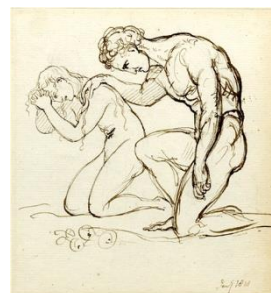
Of course the world has some things that are *not* so good. I'm not trying to be Pollyanna. It wasn't long after the world emerged all fresh and wet and fertile

as a springtime garden, that things started to go awry.

This happens when we have choices, doesn't it? We make decisions that are not good. We lean toward what is self-serving, rather than serving God's good purpose. We make ourselves the star of the show, not realizing that a bowl full of salt, all by itself, is not quite what we imagine it to be.

Instead of all things living in balance and harmony together, we grab what does not belong to us. We want more.

Then realizing what we've done, we hide in the shadows, like Adam and Eve in the first garden of the world, embarrassed and full of shame. We avoid the light. Because the light exposes our mistake, revealing a side of ourselves we'd rather not see. (See John 3:19-21)

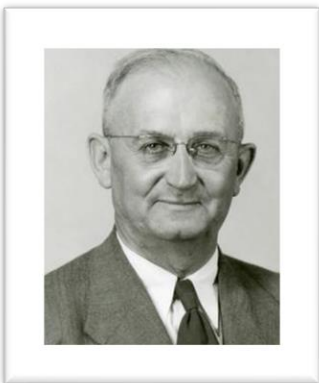


Adam and Eve, illustration to Milton's 'Paradise Lost,' pen and brown ink, by the British artist Sir George Hayter. 153 mm x 142 mm. Courtesy of the British Museum, London.



Salty people always see the good in others. The good that God sees. It may be hard to find it sometimes, but it's there. No matter how bent and broken our human lives may be, we never quite lose the image of God. It's still there, always there, waiting to be discovered.

It there anyone who's seen the good in you? Something that maybe you didn't even know existed. Someone who recognized your giftedness? Someone who believed in you? Someone who called forth the very best in you?



From what I've heard, J.J. Thiessen may have had some of those gifts. For those who may be newer to our congregation, J.J. Thiessen was a prominent figure among Mennonites in Saskatchewan and beyond. And he was the first minister of our church.

Someone told me how he never forgot a name. He had a knack for recognizing people and remembering who they were, making them feel that they were valued. (For someone like me, who sometimes struggles with names, I recognize that as a gift.)

And someone else told me how he had a habit of coming up and putting his hand on your shoulder and saying something like this: "I could see *you* doing that." In doing so, he affirmed that person and called forth gifts they didn't realize they had.

J.J. was a salty person. Perhaps you know others. Someone who sees past your shortcoming and manages to bring out the best of who you are. Sometimes spouses can be like that. And mothers. ... And *Jesus*.



Jesus is salt and light incarnate. “In him was life, and the life was the light of all people.” (John 1:4) The light of the world comes among us and our lives become brighter and better because of it. Just ask Peter, the one who denied him. Yet Jesus called him the Rock and said he would build his church upon him.

Ask the woman at the well, the one who had so many husbands, and the one she had now was not her husband. Yet Jesus gave her living water. We could go on, couldn't we? Salt and light.



Can we *lose* our saltiness?

This is a picture of the Dead Sea. It's kind of a unique place. Water flows in, but the only way out is through evaporation. The water that remains is full of minerals, so very little can live in it. Hence the name, Dead Sea.



סיימון פליגל  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:PikiWiki\\_Israel\\_48530\\_Geography\\_of\\_Israel.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:PikiWiki_Israel_48530_Geography_of_Israel.jpg)

If you go to Watrous, you can find something similar. There is such a high concentration of minerals in the water that you can float on the surface. It's even said to have healing properties. First Nations people recognized it as a sacred place.

What you see in this picture are salt formations at the southern tip of the Dead Sea. And while some of that is edible salt, not all of it is. Some of it is actually quite foul. Some of it is bland gypsum, which may have a purpose – but seasoning it is *not!*

“If salt has lost its saltiness, how can it be restored?” asks Jesus. And the plain answer is, it can't. In the same way, says Jesus, no one lights a lamp then hides it under a bushel. That would be silly. “Let your light shine before others.” he says.

Let your light be bright, and your salt be salty. Be who you are. Be your *best* selves, your sometimes hidden selves. So that others can be *their* best selves as well.

“You are salt for the earth, O people.” The words of that hymn we sing have it right. We are not salt for our own sake. We are salt to be shared, showing up at the right time and the right place to enhance the lives of others. And to make real the presence of God's kingdom.



Salt for the *earth*, light for the *world*. Sometimes I think our vision may be too limited. We in the church can't always see beyond ourselves. We become focussed on inward things: Making sure we get every bit of our theology and structure correct and fretting about our survival. But Jesus has a bigger vision. A vision that sees us, the whole church, enhancing the life of the whole world.

It's like the promise God made to Abraham, to bless his offspring ... so that by them *all* the families of the earth might be blessed. (Genesis 12:2-30) God's purposes are often larger than we think!



And so, after blessing that little gathering of folk who gathered on the hillside to hear him teach, Jesus says more or less the same thing to them. “I give you this blessing to *share*: You are salt for the earth, light for the world.”



“Shine” by Mike Moyers (from Art in the Christian Tradition, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=57144> [retrieved January 31, 2023]. Original source: Mike Moyers, <https://www.mikemoyersfineart.com/>.)

When you leave this place, live your life in such a way that it brings out the best in others. Look for the good in them. And when you find it, let them know it.

Don’t be blinded by darkness. Open your eyes to the light. *Be* the light that makes all things beautiful.

In all your relationships, sprinkle a little salt. Not too much. Just enough to enhance the flavour. Let your interactions be positive and life-giving. Let your way be loving and just, gracious and kind. Be a witness to God’s kingdom. And encourage it to grow wherever you may be.

“You are salt. You are light.” May it be so! Amen.