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Scripture: Matthew 5:13-16, Salt and Light

I had one of those *aha* moments this past week. Has anyone ever have one of those moments when it is like the world just stands still as your mind is illuminated with a profound truth that has perplexed you for years? I bet you didn't know that an *aha* moment is actually a scientific phenomenon. It is also known as the Eureka Effect.

The Eureka Effect refers to *the common human experience of suddenly understanding a previously incomprehensible problem or concept*. It gets its name from a story of an ancient Greek mathematician by the name of Archimedes. As the story goes, Archimedes was asked by a king to determine whether his crown was pure gold. As he was pondering how to figure this mystery out, Archimedes made a trip to the local public bath house. As his body sunk into the bath, he noticed that the water that was displaced equaled the volume of his body. It was at that moment that it clicked in his mind that he had now conceived of a way to measuring the volume of an irregular object and he could solve the King's problem of the crown. He was so excited with his discovery that he leaped out of the bath and ran home naked, shouting "Eureka", which means, *I have found it!*

Let me just say that my *aha*, Eureka, *I have found it* moment may have been a little less dramatic but riveting all the same to me.

It didn't happen in a bath and I did not run naked through the streets, I can assure you of that. No, my big moment happened early one morning, sitting in my favourite chair, newspaper in hand, coffee and toast by my side. As I bit into the toast it was as if bells went off, a chorus of angels were singing the Hallelujah chorus and a smug grin spread across my face. *Aha*, now I get it. Are you curious about what

it was that enlightened me so? Let me set it up with this.

Have you noticed one of the biggest fads in food over the past 3-4 years has been sweet and salty? It seems everywhere you turn, food companies are coming up with new variations of this combination of sweet and salty. There are; Chicago Mix Popcorn, salted caramels, chocolate covered pretzels, pineapple bacon bites and french fries dipped in Chocolate Milk shakes. The list goes on.

The science behind this is actually quite interesting. As we know, salt isn't just a nutrient, it is also a flavor enhancer. Foodies or those who work with and study food have discovered that when you mix sugar and salt, the salt actually enhances the sugar flavor. Chefs call this **flavor layering**, and the right mix--not too sweet and not too salty--gives your brain a positive biological response and keeps you coming back for more. Sweet and Salty is the perfect match.

The piece of toast I bit into that I described earlier (the one that gave me the *aha* moment), do you know what was on it? Peanut butter and jam. I have been eating and loving it since I was a kid. When I bit into this past week, it suddenly occurred to me, Sweet and salty. *Aha*. That is why it tastes so good. It is not just a newest fad. We knew about it long before the latest marketing gimmicks, didn't we? This *aha* moment of mine on that day also open the door of discovery of why I enjoy Reece's peanut butter cups, apple pie with cheddar cheese, ham and pineapple, turkey and cranberry sauce and Kraft dinner with ketchup. It's sweet and salty. The layering of flavours. *Aha!* I may never be the same

Did you see what you would miss if you didn't come to church?

If you are just joining with us, we launched a new message series at North Park last week that we have entitled, *On The Way*. And the premise of this series is this;

We can come here each week and hear a well-crafted sermon (hopefully) that has been dutifully prepared and prayed over and through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can learn a lot and grow in our faith.

But, if we think the only time Jesus wants to teach us something is limited to one hour on Saturday night or Sunday in here, we are missing the everyday, spontaneous moments that he has for us each and every day. The way that he can teach us through joys in our daily routine, through sorrows, through the mundane and even through the secular. If we are anticipating and open to what he wants to do in our lives. Do we understand that?

In this series, we are going to go back and forth between Jesus' teachings in the gospels that were a little more intentional. Where he actually gathered those around him, whether it was a crowd or a select few and had them listen as he shared with them some important truths. Much like we do each week in here. It is a little more formal and structured.

Then we will look at those teachings of Jesus that appear to be more spontaneous as he encountered people in the day to day routine of the first century world in which he lived.

The goal of this series is to observe the way that Jesus taught. To be personally impacted and transformed by his teaching and to be more perceptive to the teachable moments Jesus has for us, *On The Way*, every day.

Last week, you may remember that we kicked off looking at the opening and closing of what we have come to know as the "Sermon on the Mount" in the gospel of Matthew. The "Sermon on the Mount" stretches from Matthew chapter 5 to chapter 7 and it describes what Jesus taught his followers as a new way to live in the Kingdom of God. It was revolutionary because it was so countercultural to the way the rest of this Roman dominated world was living. At the end of the "Sermon on the Mount", Jesus gives a summons or challenge to us

not simply accept him or believe in him but to do what he teaches us to do. To make Him and the teachings of the Kingdom of God, the very foundation of our lives.

Do you remember the imagery that Jesus used at the end of his sermon? It was of two builders. The wise builder is someone who listens to Jesus teaching and follows it. Jesus is the solid foundation of their lives and not even the harshest storms can cause them to collapse. The foolish builder is someone who hears Jesus teaching and doesn't obey it. Their lives are built on the foundation of worldly values, shifting, shallow and unstable like sand and when those inevitable storms of life arise, it will all come crashing down.

So, are you a wise builder or a foolish builder? I guess we will find out as we move throughout this series. Today, we come to one of the more formal teachings of Jesus. It takes place near the beginning of the "Sermon on the Mount" so if you have your bibles, I invite you to turn to Matthew chapter 5. You may have guessed that this one has something to do with salt. Notice once again how this sermon begins.

Matthew 5:1

One day as he saw the crowds gathering, Jesus went up on the mountainside and sat down. His disciples gathered around him, ² and he began to teach them.

And look at what Jesus teaches them right off the top,

Matthew 5:3-10

"God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, God blesses those who mourn, who are humble, who hunger and thirst for justice, who are merciful, whose hearts are pure, those who work for peace, and are persecuted for doing right,

Incredible. I mean what Jesus teaches here would have been stunning to the crowd. Why? It was because it was so radical compared to the world in which they lived. God blesses the humble/poor. God blesses those who pursue righteousness and justice. God blesses those who work for peace.

People who put those priorities in their life in this culture were thought to be the weaklings, the losers.

But Jesus says here to his followers, God blesses them. Amazing. It gets even more peculiar as Jesus goes on.

Matthew 5:11-12

“God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! 12For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way.

Let's just take a moment to regroup. After his already startling remarks, Jesus says to those around him, those who choose to follow him, God blesses you when people mock you, lie about you, say evil things about you. In fact, be happy about it!

Have you ever been mocked? Have you ever been lied about? Anyone ever said evil things about you? I have had all of those things happen to me and my confession to you. My first impulse was not happiness. It was more like anger and defensiveness. What is Jesus getting at here in these statements is that the life that leads to flourishing and blessings is the life that is lived only looking at God for approval and sustenance not the approval of the world.

It is important to understand this to really appreciate the words Jesus teaches next. Remember last week, how we talked about the tactics Jesus used that made him the greatest teacher who ever lived? He told stories, shocked people, asked questions, used object lessons, crafted memorable sayings and repeated things. Jesus has just shocked the people with this introduction. He has their attention to now teach them a deeper truth and he does it by using object lesson. Visually communicated truth is more powerful than words.

Matthew 5:13-16

“You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. 14“You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house.

¹⁶In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.

Did you catch the images, salt and light? *You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.* After just teaching his followers that they may get a rough ride by people when they follow his teachings, notice Jesus doesn't instruct them to cower in the corner and protected themselves from those who will run roughshod over them.

He doesn't tell them to condemn the world that will bully and abuse them. He doesn't tell them to stick up for themselves and fight back if they have been unjustly slandered or attacked.

Instead, he calls his followers to engage the world. *You are salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.* Don't run. Don't hide. Don't secure yourself behind the walls of a building called the church. *I want you to go into the world,* Jesus says to those who choose to follow him. Jesus masterfully employed these two striking metaphors to convey something fundamental about what it means to follow him.

Now to understand what Jesus is getting at here, we have to know a little bit about what salt and light would have meant to the people of Jesus' day.

Let's start with Salt because honestly, for me to stand here and cry out to you, *You are the salt of the earth.* That may be rather uninspiring in our world today.

Why? Maybe it is because salt has been given a bit of a bad rap in our culture. The common sentiment especially amongst our health care advocates is, eat less sugar, eat less fat, eat less salt.

In 2018, Health Canada released a report that said on average, Canadians consume almost double the recommended daily amount of sodium- salt. Which is not good because it can lead to high blood pressure which is a major risk factor for heart disease and stroke.

So, *You are the salt of the earth* or *you are the MSG of the world*, may have nothing but negative connotations for us. But, what did Jesus' followers hear? How would they have understood this

metaphor, *You are the salt of the earth?* What did salt represent to them?

Well, salt was used as wage that you paid someone in ancient times. It was also used as a healing antiseptic but probably the two most common uses for salt in Jesus' day were:

Salt was a preservative. Due to the lack of refrigeration, salt was used to preserve food, especially meat and fish which could quickly spoil or decay in the Middle Eastern climate.

Salt was a flavour enhancer. That's right. Two thousand years before "sweet and salty" became a thing, the first century Greco Roman world were already on to it. They knew about flavour layering and how a dash of salt could just bring out the different taste sensations of the food.

I think these two meanings describe well, the point Jesus was making to his followers with this statement, *You are the salt of the earth.* It is as if he is saying, *as you go out into the world, may your life that is rooted in me and on my teachings, preserve the earth from the decay of evil intentions of ungodly people and the corruption of sin.* That makes sense.

It is as if he is saying, *as you go out into the world, may your life that is rooted in me and on my teachings enhance the flavour of life in this world. Where there is conflict may you bring peace, where there is sorrow may you bring comfort. Where there is chaos may you bring hope.* That fits as well.

What a great metaphor, another bit of brilliant teaching by Jesus. But, did you notice Jesus didn't stop at *You are the salt of the earth?*

Look at the passage again.

Matthew 5:13

"You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless.

Jesus follows this metaphor of being salt, with two pretty important rhetorical questions. Remember that was another teaching tactic of Jesus. It's what set him apart as a great teacher. He asked really good questions.

But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again?

Losing the saltiness of salt is actually quite difficult did you know that? Do we have any chemists in here or any chemistry students? Do we have any grade 11 students here who are taking chemistry? I think grade 11 is the first year you take chemistry in High School.

Two weeks into classes have you gotten to the periodic table and the chemical properties of Sodium Chloride, NaCl? Table Salt. Sodium Chloride is actually so chemically stable that it will not lose its saltiness even after being stored in a container for many years.

But there are a few ways in which salt may appear to lose its saltiness.

1. If exposed to condensation or water, the sodium chloride could be dissolved and removed and lose its saltiness.
2. Salt loses its saltiness by contamination.

In Jesus' day most of the salt was taken from the Dead Sea and it could sometimes be contaminated by different minerals, especially something called gypsum which is also found in the sea and looks quite similar to salt. Gypsum can cause salt to not only lose its saltiness but its overall effectiveness for anything. When salt collides with Gypsum, it becomes good for nothing. Useless.

The caution Jesus gives here is a very important one, especially for those who choose to follow him. Those who are salt of the earth, beware of being contaminated. Beware of being watered down and losing your saltiness.

A compromised Christian is a contaminated Christian. A compromised Church is a contaminated Church.

When we take seriously the God given mandate to go out and be salt to the earth, to preserve it and enhance it for the Glory of God, we also have to be careful that we don't lose our uniqueness, our saltiness by becoming contaminated and watered down by the influence of the world. Do you understand that? It is such an important point Jesus is making here.

North Park church will lose its saltiness, its powerful witness that we have for Jesus in our city and our world if we knowingly or unknowingly, allow the world to contaminate us with its values that are so counter to Jesus.

It can happen so subtly though can't it? In a recent article I read on recycling, do you know that even a few spoonfuls of peanut butter left in a jar that has been placed in a recycling bin can contaminate the other recyclables particularly paper and instead of being recycled it has to be trashed. Contamination is costing recycling programs millions of dollars every year in Canada.

That can happen in the Church.

We become a little complacent, let down the guard and before you know it, we water down some of Jesus' teaching or relax some of his kingdom values and contamination sets in. We lose our unique message to the world and our saltiness is gone.

You are the salt of the earth, Jesus says. Go into the world to preserve and enhance it for my glory but be on guard that in the process you don't lose your taste. That thing that makes your life so appealing by being contaminated by the world.

Look at the second metaphor in this text.

Matthew 5:14

*"You are the light of the world—*This image may be a little more familiar to us. I think we all understand light and the value it brings.

What are the qualities of light?

It makes things visible. It reveals or exposes things in the dark. This is why we flick on a light in a darkened room or use a flashlight at night on a path.

Light gives direction. You may have passed through some of these on the way to church today. Stop lights. It is amazing the power of light. A red one and everyone stops. A green one and everyone goes. A yellow one and everyone steps on the gas. Light gives direction.

Light gives off heat. You would know this if you ever tried to change a light bulb that has been on for a while. Or if you owned an Easy Bake Oven as a

kid. Do you remember those things? You could bake a little cake by the heat of a light bulb.

Light attracts. You would be aware of this phenomena if on a summer night you leave the door to your house open for too long, the moths and bugs are drawn to the lights inside the house. It is called Phototaxis.

Light Reflects. I don't know whether you were up after midnight on Friday but there was a full moon, a harvest moon as they call it in September. A full moon is when the entire face of the moon is illuminated by the Sun's rays. The sun's light is reflected off the moon.

There are many more qualities of light I am sure, but what would those listening to Jesus on this day have understood when he looked out upon them and said, *You are the light of the world?* They didn't live in a world that was bombarded by light like we do. We have LED, street lights, bill boards, cell phones and computer screens. We have lights bombarding us 24/7.

In Jesus' day all they had was the sun, the moon, oil lamps, candles and fire. When the sun went down. It was dark. These people understood what darkness was, to sit in darkness and the hope that a flicker of light can bring to that environment. Have you ever experienced something like that? Maybe the closest thing for us is to have a black out, when the power goes off at night. Everything is pitch dark. You can't just go and flip a switch and the whole room lights up. That's when the candles come out and we experience the power of a light in the midst of darkness.

When Jesus says to his followers, *"You are the light of the world,* he is saying that when we receive him and follow his teachings, we become children of the light, Jesus. We take his light that is reflected in us through the Holy Spirit out into the darkened world.

The reality is, our world can be a pretty dark place. It hides in the darkness. Just read the papers and listen to the news and you will get an idea of the evil things that are done under the cloak of darkness. By living our lives embedded in Jesus and his teachings, we are a flicker of light, a beacon of hope in the darkness. The church is a beacon of hope in a dark world.

But just like in the salt metaphor, Jesus doesn't end with *You are the light of the world*. Did you notice how he continues?

Matthew 5:14-16

“You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.

Just like with salt, that can lose its saltiness, there is risk associated with the role of being a light bearer. It is the desire or the tendency to hide it or to keep the light to ourselves.

Remember the audience around Jesus as he was teaching were his disciples. Here he is comparing them to a city on a hill. A city that cannot be hidden. What was the city on a hill that Jesus was referring to? It was Jerusalem. These followers know the Old Testament Scriptures well.

Psalm 121

*I look up to the mountains—
does my help come from there?*

The Psalmist is not talking about looking up into the sky for help. He is talking about looking to Jerusalem for help because it is literally, a city on a hill. It is where the temple of God was. That is where his help comes from because God dwells in the temple. It can't be hidden. Just like our church in this city cannot be hidden. We are not to keep the light of Christ in us to ourselves or cover it up. It is meant to shine out into the world and people cannot help but take notice.

How does our light shine? Jesus is clear here that it is by our actions. It is by the way that we live, our good deeds that are not possible under our own strength but come from listening to Jesus' teachings and doing what he asks us to do through his Spirit in us.

It involves humbly pursuing righteousness and justice in our world and to work for peace with gracious and loving hearts. When people see the church reflecting the light of Christ in these areas of our darkened world, it will point them to God. They

will give glory and praise to God. Isn't that amazing? Do you see how salt and light go together in this teaching of Jesus? If we preserve and enhance life, salt it, then we will shine a light for Christ into the shadows where humanity tends to exist.

So as we sit here, I guess we have to ask ourselves, how can we be salt and light to our world? Do you see this salt package and this salt box? As I said earlier, salt will not lose its saltiness in this box or package for years. But salt can't do what it is intended to do if you never let it out of the box. If you never open the package and spread it around.

That is like us. It is one thing for us to know Jesus and believe Jesus in our heads, but if we never let it transfer to our hearts and our actions, it is useless. We have to spread Jesus around.

I love this note that I received from a person in our church this week. He wrote me this sincere request; *Paul, how can I, as a public school teacher, be Christ in the workplace*. In other words, he is asking how he can be salt and light in the environment in which he has been placed, the public school system. I love the sincerity of this guy's desire to not simply keep learning about Jesus but to actually “open the package and spread him around.

Here are some suggestions to him and to you.

Stay connect to the body of Christ, the church.

Remember, we want to continue to learn and grow and have a strong foundation, so that when we do go into the world, we are not contaminated by it. We need to have our faith strong. That may mean attending church, being part of a small group, taking some of our “Going Deeper” electives.

Go. Get out of the church building. Get out of your house. Prayerfully determine where it is that you can be salt and light. Is it in your workplace? Your school? Your neighbourhood? Your extended family? Pray about your influence there. God will give you opportunities to be salt and light.

Don't be afraid in take an interest in people's lives. Live in such a way that it adds value wherever you go.

We have a neighbor that broke her ankle this past spring. In our conversations with her, we found out that she didn't have a ride to one of her physiotherapy appointments. Carolyn volunteered to drive her and that simple gesture has led to a deepening relationship where this woman is engaging us in conversations about God. Her husband wants to know more about our faith.

Being salt and light means that we may have to get a little messy. It may involve putting ourselves out there and sacrificing a little but people notice and want to know why we live the way that we live. They will want to know, why we do the things that we do. That will allow us to share our motivation with them. It is Jesus.

Preserve. Use your influence to stand for things that preserve Godly ideals and take a stand against those things that lead to moral decay. Don't just sit idly by and complain when something touches your heart. Sit on a committee at your school, neighbourhood or in the city. Host a garage sale and donate the money to a reputable cause.

The ideas are endless. But remember, don't over salt. Season everything with love and grace. May your life and actions refresh people not frustrate them.

Serve. Show acts of love and good works to carry the message of Jesus to others. Here is the problem. When we focus only on ourselves, or only on the church, we get tunnel vision which can become, self-serving. When you serve others, it takes our eyes off ourselves and gives our lives renewed purpose and meaning. At North Park, we have so many opportunities to serve not just in here but also outside the walls of this building.

If you go to our *NPGO* (North Park GO) section on our web page and then go to *community*, you will see opportunities to serve in our community. Those are just some ideas. The key thing is to have an open and available heart to go wherever and do whatever God calls.

"You are the salt of the earth.

"You are the light of the world—

Notice Jesus doesn't say, you can be salt of the earth or the light of the world. No, it is *You are*. The choice is ours whether we spread the salt and uncover the light and *let our good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.*

Points to Ponder

On The Way ~ Salt and Light

With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.

1. Discuss some of the strange and not so strange sweet and salty concoctions that you enjoyed as a child or maybe indulge in now.
2. Have you ever had someone mock, lie or say evil things about you because you chose to follow Jesus? Describe the circumstance. How did you respond? Why did Jesus say to be happy about it?
3. Salt is used to preserve and enhance the flavour of something. Have you ever had the experience of being "salt" in someone's life to preserve and enhance their life? Describe the experience.
4. Discuss ways in which we, as Christians can be contaminated by the world. What are some ways that the church can be contaminated by the world?
5. Describe a time when you were able to shine the light of Jesus into a dark situation.
6. Discuss some ways that Jesus' use of these metaphors of salt and light in his teaching challenge you in your faith journey.

Prayer and Action Item

Pray for one another out of the key points that were discussed. Brainstorm and then pray specifically for opportunities for each of you to be salt and light in the world.