

Grace, mercy & peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

I suppose we all remember being called something. Something that we didn't like – Something that made us ashamed or humiliated us. The lucky ones have face those demons as adults, stripping them of their power over us. Some of us have long since ***buried those labels and names deep within ourselves. Some of us hear them still.*** Worse yet, ***some of us have come to believe those words,*** and begin to see ourselves in that way.

Pee Wee.... Lazy..... useless.... Idiot.... Troublemaker.... Worthless...
Dummy.... Dweeb... Nutcase... Goofball.... Fatty.... Ugly.... Fill in the blank
(pause)

Today, we were called something new. It's not "worthless" or "fat" or "ugly" or "stupid" or "pee wee." Today, we are called ***salt of the earth*** and ***light of the world.*** By the very breath of God we are called something, ***to become something new*** – the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

This text is so well known and familiar that it is often misunderstood, as though we "*are the salt,* or we "*are the light of the world.*"

But salt by itself is hopeless even deadly. There is nothing so useless, so unmanageable, and so inedible as salt by itself. Ask Lot's wife. Pure salt is useless. In a time of famine, you cannot eat it. In a time of drought, you cannot drink it. Salt by itself is not good.

Salt only becomes useful when it is used, as Jesus indicates in today's text, mixed up with other things.

We are **not** simply salt. We are ***salt of the earth.*** We should be mixed up with the earth. We should be mixed up with the reality around us.

If Christians say or think: "*We are the salt of the earth,*" we should

understand that, as a consequence, we should be prepared to be thrown in the cooking pot of human affairs. We cannot remain in the shaker just sitting in front of the pot. We have to be thrown into that pot and stirred in until we meld with what's in that pot. Because only when salt becomes indistinguishably dissolved and blended with the contents of the pot – only then – does it enhance flavor of the dish, producing the dramatic, favorable improvement God desires.

We have to be boiled and smothered by it, practically disappearing in the process, but, nevertheless, seasoning all of creation with the word and hope of God's love and promised redemption.

Jesus also calls us light this morning. Again, we may eagerly call ourselves the light – standing in our own light, like a candle in an empty room, or a light under an empty bucket, glorifying its own shining.

But again, light alone is useless, too. Too much light causes disorientation or even insanity – sometimes this happens to people in Alaska when daylight continues 24 hours in a row day after day. IN the south too much sunlight without any shade causes sun stroke, and can even kill a person. Looking at too bright a light can temporarily or sometimes permanently blind a person. Bright light shined into the eyes of prisoners is a form of torture. Too much light can cause damage.

On the other hand, without any light, life is not possible; nothing grows. In the absence of any light mine mules would eventually go blind, and when their usefulness in the mines ended they were put out to pasture, but remained in the dark.

Light alone does not make you see anything at all. ***Light becomes useful when it shines on something other than itself*** – when it becomes ***a***

light for something. As Jesus calls His disciples as light, we are the light “of the world” or “for the world.” Jesus says: ***“You are the light of the world.*** Focused outward on the world, we can light up possibilities, brighten the world, and bring hope into dark places.

Salt seasons, making what it seasons better; a little making a dramatic difference. Light reveals, making us see things that don’t seem to be there without it – possibilities, hope, a future.

In our ***first lesson this morning the prophet tells us how to shine as God’s light of the world, how to season the word as salt of the earth.*** He says that our light will break forth ***when the chains of injustice are loosed, the cords of the yoke untied, the oppressed are freed, the hungry are fed, the poor wanderer is given shelter, the naked are clothed, and when we meet the needs of our brothers and sisters.***

Doubtless, we probably all remember being called something at some time in our lives. ***As a pastor it is my role to remind you what Jesus calls you. NOT "fat" nor "worthless" nor "ugly" nor “stupid”.... BUT Child of God.*** God names us ***not out of judgment, nor with malice, but out of love,*** as inheritors of God's Kingdom, as children forgiven with a new beginning every day, and as agents of God’s grace to season and shine upon a darkened, hopeless world.

God’s naming of us does not plague us from the past. The name bestowed on us in Baptism ***calls us in love towards a future of grace for all.*** ***God calls us out of any darkness of our past to walk in His light, to be something new, to give us and the world around us a new future.***

The promise of being light or salt is that we can affect the things around us, we can season the blandness of the world; we can add a little light to the

darkness of this world.

This is how Jesus Christ lived, and how He died. Christ mixed himself into the pot of humanity's sin, *seasoning it with mercy and forgiveness. His gentleness, meekness, and humility in accepting the cross shone a light on God's strength.* Strength not in dominating with violence or power, but by demonstrating God's will to endure, to forgive, to outlast our selfishness.

Every one of the baptized receives a candle with the words: "Let your light so shine before others that they see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven." ***In the ancient baptismal liturgy everyone received a pinch of salt on their lips. Identities that shape how we see ourselves and live our lives. Who we are, and who we can yet become.***

When we live and act as Christ did – placing God's world before ourselves – seasoning and revealing the world as God desires it to be – God's salvation, hope, and future are revealed and made manifest.

Hear again the prophet's words:

*If you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.
The LORD will guide you continually,
and satisfy your needs in parched places,
and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. ...
You shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to live in.*

Amen!!!