

I speak to you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our gospel reading for today are four verses. In this short passage we find powerful and inspiring words that give instruction on how we as followers of Christ are to live. Essentially Jesus calls us to live our lives in such a way that we are salt of the earth and light of the world.

In what ways are you living your lives so that someone might call you salt of the earth or light of the world?

I think this text invites us

to reflect on our current actions and behaviours,

to consider the depths of our relationships and partnerships,

and it encourages us to function and live in ways that matter and are transformative.

Salt acts on its environment; it can change the state of something or enliven something.

Did you see people lined up for a few days outside fire halls in the lower mainland of Vancouver last month? People were looking for salt to clear the ice on their sidewalks and lanes. I don't know how many people would know that salt caused a chemical reaction inside the ice... lowering the freezing point of the water and disrupting the ice-forming process. They were simply looking for results; they wanted to return to a safer state of being.

I find it interesting Jesus is calling us, his disciples, to be the salt of the earth...

Do you think Jesus might have had a vision of us in the church evoking chemical reactions...

being catalysts of new ministries and missions...

creating positive energy and perhaps using some creativity to fulfill a function that resulted in actions for the common good?

Have you ever watched a reality TV show with a celebrity chef?

Often the words of instruction or complaint (depending on who the celebrity chef is) will tell the contestant that the dish that has been prepared requires more salt. Then the master chef will elaborate on how one of the most common mistakes in cooking is that new chefs underestimate the amount of salt needed in a dish.

The purpose of salt, we are told, is to enliven and improve the taste of food. It is a flavour enhancer.

Whether one uses sea salt, kosher salt, or a finishing salt, the goal of using salt is to lift the natural flavour and aroma of the ingredients making them taste good.

In what ways can you imagine Jesus inviting you to be the salt needed in a group of people to bring out best practices or to rally behind one purpose that achieves results?

The second metaphor Jesus uses is that of light. We his disciples are called to be the light of the world.

In and through our lives we are to glorify God, bear witness to Jesus Christ and trust in the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We are to be like a lamp on a lampstand giving light to all in the house.

Light also has a powerful influence on its environment.

If you travel internationally across several time zones you have probably heard the advice that upon arrival - go for a walk and catch some rays of sunshine - that will help you adjust over the jet lag.

Natural light helps to restore the circadian rhythm.

Our life in Christ helps provide balance, peace and joy in our lives.

The Christian community also lifts up the people of God through fellowship, worship, proclamation, teaching, mission and service.

We are to be like a lamp on a lampstand... like a city on a hill... visible for all to see.

Two weeks ago Roberta Bondar, Canada's first female astronaut was celebrating her 25th anniversary since going into space aboard the space shuttle Discovery. Bondar who is also an accomplished photographer shared her story and photos in a book called *Touching the Earth*. As she provides a new perspective on the meaning of home through prose, the luminescence of the cities seen from space take your breath away. Our lives are to be as beautiful and radiant as that - visible for all to see.

I think Jesus is inviting us to be a light or a influence in the world that pushes back the darkness. We are to touch the lives of others by sharing hope and encouragement, hospitality and community so that Spirit may bring about transformation, healing and renewal.

In Anne Lamott's book, *Travelling Mercies: Some thoughts on Faith*, this woman tells of her own conversion. She had lived a hard life as a young person - not experiencing success in personal relationships, family or her writing career. It wasn't long before she was drinking and using drugs heavily.

Ann Lamott was near hitting bottom when she noticed a small church across the street from the Greyhound depot which on Sundays became the site of the local flea market.

Lamott first noticed the church when she heard some of the gospel music coming from its doors. Her grandparents had taken her to church when she was a child and the tunes were familiar.

It took Ann months to find the courage to cross the street and stand in the doorway and listen. It took her even more months to enter and take a chair near the back of the sanctuary; but gradually this caring congregation with a choir made up of five black women and one rather Amish-looking white man worked its love... and Ann discovered a congregation of thirty people or so, who radiated kindness and warmth.

Ann continued to journey with them and slowly she reduced her dependence on chemicals and eventually stopped drinking. A year later she was baptized in the congregation and became a member of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Marin City, California.

The folk of this little church who rallied around Ann were the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Their actions made a difference. Their relationship with Ann gave life. Their openness to greet, accept, support and include the stranger is an example of how followers of Jesus are to be salt of the earth and light of the world.

This past week I caught myself thinking about the Amnesty International logo. It was designed two years after the formation of the British organization whose purpose is to support prisoners of conscience all over the world. The logo is a candle wrapped in barbed wire.

It had been chosen for the organization's first Christmas card and because of its simplicity and the effectiveness of its symbolism the logo became the organization's brand. The logo combines two recognizable images to convey complex notions: barbed wire communicates oppression, while a burning candle evokes hope. It was inspired by the Chinese proverb, "Better to light a candle than curse the darkness".

I saw many lit candles on Monday night at City Hall when some 500 Calgarians stood vigil to mourn the killing of six men in a mass shooting on Sunday night at the Centre Culturel Islamique de Québec that left 19 others injured. People gathered for various reasons. Some to support the grieving families and the Muslim community, some to stand up to fear and division, others to remember the fallen who were ordinary people who had gathered in friendship and faith to pray for awhile. One person held a sign that night that said "#BanHate let love in."

At times like this when a nation is experiencing anxiety, grief and shock we can find it difficult and perhaps awkward to know how best to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. But I think Jesus would want us to try. How do our words and actions lift up others who may be hurt, sad, confused or broken? When everybody is building walls, how do we in the church strive to build bridges?

I remember attending a funeral over 12 years ago. A friend's mother had died. He reached out to some of his choir friends to see if we could sing at his mother's funeral. About 12 of us were able to attend and we sang from Brahms' German Requiem, *How lovely is your dwelling place*. I had never met his mother, the woman we remembered that day. But I learned a great deal about her in that one hour of worship.

I learned as a teenager, she and her family fled to Ecuador because their Christian beliefs put them into conflict with the Nazi regime. I heard how she raised her family as a pastor's wife in rural Saskatchewan. Just caring for the family was difficult, melting snow in the winter and hauling water from a pond in the summer. Although her life was tough, her heart was full of love and grace. I came away grateful for being there. Even in her death she pointed me to Christ. Her faithful witness inspired us all to "Go salt and light our world."

All of us need the light to find our way in the darkness... to help us find our way home.

One night I was at church meeting and all the light were on upstairs. A woman came to the door and rang the bell. She said, "I have driven through the neighbourhood and you were the only church I could find with the lights on. Would it be possible for me to come and pray?"

As I lead the woman into the sanctuary she turned to me and said, "My mother died back home in Australia. The funeral is taking place right now. I knew I couldn't be there but I just wanted to be in a church praying when they were all praying. Would it be all right to stay here for awhile?"

I asked her if she wanted me to pray with her. We did and then I left her to be still with God. Let us remember that the light of Jesus Christ is a gift for us too; for it brings comfort and peace.

I gave my father a painting one year before he died. It was from a local artist in Cochrane. The painting was of a cowboy riding a horse and holding a calf through a terrible snow storm. The calf had been born in the night and needed extra protection. The cowboy was taking it back to the barn and the mother was leading the way. How did the cow know the way home? The artist told me, she followed the light.

Jesus instructs us to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world so that peoples lives are changed and we are changed by the power of the Holy Spirit working through us all.

May we use our natural gifts and talents to glorify God.

May we accept the challenge to go salt and light our world.

Amen.