

Sermon Wesley Box Hill 8 February 2026

SALT AND LIGHT – Matthew 5: 13-20

Greetings once again in the precious name of our Lord Saviour Jesus Christ.

Is anyone feeling particularly salty today? How about bright and shining?

In today's gospel reading which is a small part of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says that "You are the salt of the earth" and "You are the light of the world". He's preaching about salt and light but that's not really what he's talking about.

What he's really talking about is you and me. Salt and light are the metaphors Jesus uses to talk about us and our lives, but doesn't give us much more than the metaphors. Jesus is inviting us to taste and see our lives, their quality, character, their impact, what's working and what's not.

What's Jesus getting at when he says, "You are the salt of the earth"?

What does that mean for you today? We've all tasted food and said, "Please pass the salt." And we've tasted food and said, "I need some water." Salt seasons and flavours food, but it has to be the right amount.

If there's not enough salt the food is tasteless and bland. If there is too much you can barely swallow it. What parts of your life are well seasoned and flavourful? What parts are bland, tasteless, and in need of salt?

Are there parts of your life today that you can't swallow? If so, what's going on, and what are you doing about it?

Think about salt in your relationships. In what ways are you flavouring and enhancing the lives of others? What difference are you making in the world? What relationships need some salt? What kind and how much?

Don't forget, salt can also dry things out. In what ways have you and I become salty and difficult to be with?

Have we left another dry and thirsty? What parts of your life are dry and parched? Salt is a preservative. What are you preserving these days?

Is it worth preserving and keeping? What in your life today needs salting and preserving, and what needs to be let go off?

Salt can also be corrosive. What has become corrosive in your life?

In what ways have we become corrosive to ourselves or another?

Roman soldiers were often paid with salt. It held value. Maybe Jesus is saying that you and I are of value. Do we recognise that about ourselves and one another?

Are we living in ways that are worth our salt? What does that look like in each of our lives today? Are we being true to ourselves, authentic, or are we betraying ourselves? Yes, we are of value but sometimes we need to take ourselves with a grain of salt.

The right mixture of salt and water can clean wounds, prevent infection, and promote healing.

What needs healing in your life today and what might that look like? In what ways are we tending to and healing the wounds of others? We need to remember that no one likes having salt

rubbed into their wound. Compassion is key. What would it be like to hold the pain of another and taste the salt in our tears?

Not only are “you the salt of the earth,” “you are the light of the world.”

Matthew 5: 14 says “A person does not light a lamp then cover it with a bowl. They place it on a lamp stand, where it can provide light to all in that house”. You are the light of the world. Not physical light, but personal light; the light of faith, hope and love; the light of truth and compassion, justice and courage, sensitivity, mercy and forgiveness; the very light of God within you and radiating from you.

Are you the light of the world? This is a big call.

There is no doubt about the shadows and the darkness that we encounter in the world around us. There are a multitude of bewildered souls looking for some light. That is where we are supposed to come in.

The love of God in Christ Jesus, the very Light of Light, is intended to shine in and through our daily affairs. We are supposed to have this illuminated and illuminating quality. Matthew tells us, Let your light so shine before others, that they may see your good deeds, and give glory to God in heaven. Does it? Does your light shine?

Like myself, I’m sure that each of you has plenty of room for improvement.

But I am not seeking to take you on a guilt trip. There is a much healthier and more faithful direction for me to take in this sermon.

Hear again what Jesus actually said to his followers:

You are the light of the world. You are. You are now! Not you could be, or should be. Not to tidy up your act, stiffen your will power, and commence trying. Not maybe in ten years’ time, nor if you work very hard perhaps by the end of the year.

Jesus did not say to his disciples “Now go off, learn these creeds, sign this mission statement, undertake these spiritual exercises, pray for two hours each day, read two chapters of the Bible each day, fast and meditate; then you will start to become the light of the world. “By trusting the unexpected, unearnable grace of God as it flows to you through Jesus’ words and deeds, you are now the light of the world.”

It is not our light but God’s light. Not by our strenuous efforts but by pure grace. Jesus must have been like pepper in the noses of the religious authorities in Israel.

They taught: IF you keep all the laws and regulations of the Old Testament, and observe the additional by-laws that our rabbis have added for your own good, if you ritually wash and purify yourself each day, if you make the requisite sacrifices at the temple, and avoid any contact or fellowship with the despicable non-Jews, then ... just maybe, you may begin to be a little light in the darkness of the world.

Not so, Jesus. His only requirement was to accept the free gift of love that God offers. Simply to come as you are. Just open your windows to the light and allow it to touch even the dusty corners of your heart and soul. Then without any question, you will be the light of the world.

The light of God is a free gift: a gift to be lovingly accepted, celebrated, cherished and freely shared. Dare we believe it? Did I overhear someone’s thoughts just now? And did those thoughts have an exclamation mark?

Something like, “If we are the light of the world, then things are grim! God must be desperate!” Dare you and I believe what Jesus says? His words sound too easy, too simple, and too unrealistic, given what goes on in the human mind and soul.

He does not seem to take into account what shadowy, cunning, perverse and evasive creatures that we are. It seems too good to be true.

Dare we believe that simply by faith, by opening our hearts to Jesus, we have a new status, and actually become the light of the world? Maybe one or two of you are busy arguing within your heads: “This preacher does not know me. Nor does he know most of these people whom I see sitting around this church today.

Some of us are so far from being the light of the world that it would be outrageously funny, if it were not so desperately sad. If this preacher truly knew us, he would not go on waffling about us being the beacons of hope!”

How about this then? Perhaps I do know; maybe I know much more than you suppose? Perhaps I have a very reliable source of information. Inside information! Before you rashly start to wonder who among this congregation has dobbed you in, let me quickly explain that my sources are very close to me. In fact, they are here right in front of you.

I know about your inadequate discipleship because I know about mine. The main reason that I became a Lay Preacher is because I am a sinner who has been forgiven much by Jesus dying on the cross for me, bearing my guilt and shame that I might be free.

I happen to be a Harry Potter fan. How many others here enjoy Harry Potter? One of the most enjoyable moments for me in the book and the film “Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets” comes towards the end of the story when Harry Potter tricks Lucius Malfoy into giving Dobby, his enslaved house elf, Tom Riddle’s diary in which Harry has hidden one of his socks.

Lucius calls Dobby to come along, but Harry whispers to him “Open it”.

Dobby opens the diary and finds inside it the sock that has been given to him and says: “Master has given Dobby a sock! Master has given Dobby clothes! Dobby is free!”. Like Dobby, I can say “Master has given his life for Bruce. Master has died in Bruce’s place. Bruce is free!”

I want to share the joy of my forgiveness with others, because if Jesus can forgive me, he can surely forgive you.

Let’s face it: As Christians, most of us are more inept than we would like to be. Some have many doubts. Some have bad habits.

Some have guilty secrets. Some rarely pray or read the Bible. Some can get sarcastic about spiritual matters. We can be trite, judgmental, arrogant, or just plain apathetic at times. This includes those whom you have elected to be Elders, or members of Church Council in the same way that I have been elected as an Elder and a member of the Church Council of my home church.

It is in one sense ludicrous that a motley collection of sinners like us should be charged with making decisions about the direction of the church. Also, some of you who are singing the hymns today, in your cynical moods, might think it a big laugh that folk like us can sing praises to the glory of God. Dare we believe that we are the light of the world?

Friends, take courage. It is not any silly claim of mine that I am repeating here. It is the claim of a unique person of whom it was said: "He knew what was in the heart of men and women." As long as our lives remain open to the Holy Spirit, we shall be, in spite of our defects, the light of the world. The tiny bits of faith, hope and love that the grace of God has sown in our minds and hearts qualify us to be bearers of the light of Christ Jesus.

I had a good Christian friend who committed suicide because he felt that he wasn't good enough. He felt that he didn't measure up to the perfection that he thought God required of him. For God's sake, and for the sake of those around you, believe more in the gift. Please do not fall into the temptation to despise yourself and give up. It is God's light, not your failings that count. Never yield to despair! Christ is always greater than your darkness! Christians like Peter, John, and Paul, Mary, Martha and Susanna; and other notable disciples, had their failures on a grand scale, yet they were indeed beacons in a dark world. By the generous grace of Christ, they were the light of the world.

There is only one thing that can prevent the light of Christ from shining through us. That is, if we choose to hide it. To be a secret Christian is not a valid option. Playwright Murray Watts tells the story of a young man who was convinced of the truth of Christianity. However, he was paralysed with fear at the very thought of having to admit to being a Christian. The idea of telling anyone about Jesus, with all the dangers of being dubbed a religious fanatic, appalled him. For many weeks he tried to banish the thought of religion from his mind, but it was no use. It was as if he heard a whisper from his conscience beckoning him to drink of the living water offered by Jesus.

At last he could stand it no longer, and consulted a very old man who had been a Christian for many years. He told the old man of his nightmare, this terrible burden of witnessing about Christ and how it was stopping him from becoming a Christian.

"Go home" said the old man, "Go to your bedroom alone. Forget the world. Forget your family, and make it a secret between you and God". The young man felt a heavy weight fall from his shoulders. "You mean, I don't have to tell anyone?" "No", said the old man, "No-one at all".

"No-one at all? asked the young man, trembling with anticipation. "Can this be right?" "It is right for you!" said the old man. The young man went home, knelt down in prayer and gave his life to Christ. Immediately, he ran down the stairs into the kitchen, where his wife, father, mother and friends were sitting. "Do you realise", he said breathlessly with excitement, "that it's possible to become a Christian without telling anyone?" When we experience Jesus in our lives, we want to tell others.

Sometimes I have heard people say, 'Surely the best kind of Christian is the kind of person who is a Christian but doesn't talk about their faith, but lives their faith. Surely, it's a private matter!' Sometimes they refer to some relation of theirs, like an 'Uncle Norman', who is this wonderful Christian but never talks about his faith.

Then the question I always want to ask is: Well, how did Uncle Norman hear about Jesus? Someone must have told him.

If the early Christians had not told people about their faith, none of us would know. So why should we tell people? Because Jesus told us to. Jesus died for us, he rose again from the dead, and then he said, Now go and tell people about this amazing news that you can be forgiven, you can be set free. You can have eternal life.'

He really had no other plans, except to use us to tell other people. God does not withdraw the light, but we can cover it up. We have free will. Should a man or woman cover it up, like a bowl over a candle, then the starved light will decline to a flicker, degenerate to acrid smoke, smoulder a while and then grow cold.

We must choose to accept Jesus Christ as our personal Saviour. The grace of God comes undiluted and free. However, like Jesus (gesture) hanging on the cross, grace is not impervious to human rejection. You are the light of the world.

A person does not light a lamp then cover it with a bowl. They place it on a lamp stand, where it can provide light to all in that house. Be salt to the earth, and let your light so shine before others, that they may see your good deeds, and give glory to God in heaven. Taste and see. What does your life taste like today? What does your life look like?

In whatever ways you might have answered these questions, and whatever you taste and see, it's just information. It is not a conclusion or final judgment. It's information for you to consider. It's a starting point. It's an invitation. It's an invitation to taste and see that will open the door to a new life, new possibilities, and new ways of being. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.