**A reading from Matthew’s Gospel, chapter 5,**

**beginning to read at verse 13.**

13 “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

14 “You are the light of the world.

A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl.

Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets.

I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them.

18 For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

19 Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

 20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

I was taking “Family Time” in a service and I brought a saltshaker from home and, after I poured a little salt in the palm of my hand I asked, “What do I have here?”  A little boy sitting next to me said, “That’s salt.”  And I said, “You’re exactly right, so what can you tell me about salt?”  He didn’t bat an eye.  He said, **“If you eat too much, it’ll kill you.”**

Some years ago, I was Joining a new church.  A friend commented, "I know those people.  You'll like them.  They're the salt of the earth."

 When my friend told me that the people in that congregation were the salt of the earth, I wasn't sure what she meant.

I understood, of course, that she intended me to understand that they were good people - but what one person might understand as good can be quite different from what another person might think.

But once I joined that new congregation, I understood exactly what my friend meant.  The people in that congregation - and the people in that neighbourhood generally - were fine people.

* They loved each other and took care of each other.
* They were committed to Christ and to their church.
* They were doing their best to raise their children as Christians.

And they were doing whatever they could to help their children get their feet firmly planted so that they would be ready for the shocks that life sometimes inflicts on us.

Fine people - people of faith - good citizens - good parents - the salt of the earth.

 Is that what Jesus means when he tells us that we are the salt of the earth?

Did Jesus mean that his disciples were fine people - good citizens?

Is that all that's involved in being the salt of the earth?

Perhaps, Jesus had something more in mind than that.

Salt is an essential ingredient of our diet.  Our bodies require salt.  Salt, in proper quantities, contributes to our **health**.

Perhaps, Jesus was saying that we - his disciples - are essential for the health of our community - for the health of our world.

 Salt is also useful for **flavouring** food.

A little salt can transform a great quantity of food.

When I was a child, mother often served porridge for breakfast. Occasionally, in her rush to get everything done, she would forget a small detail - salt in the oatmeal.

Did you ever take a spoon of porridge, only to discover that it has not been salted?   Of course, I could add salt to the porridge, but it’s not the same.  Sometimes I added too much.

The real problem was that salt needs to be **cooked** into the oatmeal.  It needs to permeate every grain of oatmeal to the core.  It needs to bind itself to the oatmeal so completely that nothing could ever separate the salt from the porridge.

Salt, in the right amount, is a wonderful thing.

I believe that Jesus says,

**"You** - **YOU are like that."  You, my disciples, might seem insignificant in numbers and power,**

**but don't underestimate yourself."**

The reality is that a **small number** people with Jesus in their hearts can change their world.

 We need to hear that because we often feel powerless.

The world's problems are so great, and we are so ordinary.  How can we help?  How can we make a difference?

But we need to remember that we are not alone.  God has given us the Holy Spirit - God's Spirit - to dwell in our hearts.

We are not dependent on our own ability - our own power.  When we're faithful to God, we become Holy Spirit powered - God-powered.

Salt is also used as a **preservative**.  Before refrigeration, people salted meat to preserve it.  That would have been a common practice in Jesus' day.

When Jesus told his disciples that they were the salt of the earth, he was acknowledging that our civilization is always in danger of decay.

You don't have to look far to see how true that is.

Just read a newspaper or listen to the media.

But Jesus, says that we are the salt of the earth, that we have the power to make a difference - to preserve what is good.

 But then Jesus warns that **salt, when it has lost its taste**, becomes worthless.  In Jesus' day they mined salt from the shores of the Dead Sea.  Some of it would be quite pure, but sometimes, the salt would be so contaminated with impurities that it would become worthless.

Jesus' point, of course, was that a Christian could become so contaminated with spiritual impurities as to become worthless spiritually.

How could that be?  What could contaminate us so thoroughly that our Christian discipleship would become worthless?

 Let’s ask ourselves what affections could so fill our heart that they could crowd out God.

  There are so many possibilities.  Some people become so focused on money that they can't think of anything else.  Jesus tells us how to fix that problem.  He says:

 **"Don't lay-up treasures for yourselves on the earth,**

**but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven - for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"**

What God really wants from us is our **heart**.  If our hearts are devoted to God, then everything else will follow.  But if our hearts are devoted to the Almighty pound, we aren't likely to give God a high place in our affections.

God wants **first place**.

I wonder what other things that might grow in our affections to the point that they crowd God out?

There must be a thousand answers to that question.

 I remember seeing a cartoon where the devil was standing in front of a big businessman's desk.  The devil asked, "How would you like to have your picture on the cover of *Time* magazine?"

 The question was really, "Would you sell your soul to get your picture in *Time* magazine?"

The question to us is,

**"What would be so attractive to you that you would sell your soul to get it?"**

Of course, put that way, all of us would answer, **"Nothing!  There's nothing so important that I would sell my soul to get it."**

Hopefully, that's true - but for many people it's not true. We learn of people doing outrageous things to get attention.  Anything for a bit of fleeting fame!   **Anything!**

People get hooked on all sorts of things.  Drugs, obviously!  But also sex!  Pornography!  Gambling!

Here's another one - **hatred**!  There are so many bad people in the world that it's hard not to hate them.  But can we truly count ourselves as Christ's disciples if we're consumed with hatred for another person - or another ethnic group - or another religious group - or anyone else that we might perceive as a threat.  Jesus warns that, just as adulterated salt can become worthless, so also adulterated **discipleship** can become worthless.

But let's not stop on that note.

Jesus also tells us that we are the **light of the world**.  That's a high compliment too.

 In the Bible, the word "darkness" usually means something bad - sin, evil, hopelessness.

When Jesus tells us that we are the light of the world, he means that we carry something within us - our faith - our love, that has the potential of penetrating the darkness - of breaking it up - of defeating it.

Light does that.  Light defeats darkness.

Darkness cannot defeat light.

Light always wins - Light always brushes aside darkness.

Faith and love - empowered by God - always pushes darkness back - kills its fearsome power - renders it null and void.

When we encounter Jesus in our hearts or in our lives he says:

**“Do not be afraid”.**

So as we go about our business this week, let’s remember:

**"You are the salt of the earth….**

**You are the light of the world…."**

Jesus said it.  **Jesus made it so. AMEN**