

**New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario
Sunday, February 9, 2020
Rev. Mark McLennan**

“LIGHTLY SALTED”

A teacher decided to make chocolate chip cookies with her class of 6-year-olds. They carefully measured the flour, creamed the butter, and mixed in the chocolate chips and nuts. You know school children - they all wanted to eat the batter and lick the spoons. But the teacher made them promise to wait. Her plan was to have them all eat their first cookie together so they could share in the joy at the same time. Twenty minutes later the first batch came out. Oh, the students were excited!

They could smell the cookies. These weren't small scrawny cookies from a package. No, these were great big golden and beautiful chocolate chip cookies. Two cookies could make a meal. Can you imagine the smell and the size of them right now? **MMMM, delicious!**

Finally, the cookies were cooled and ready. Each child grabbed his or her own. On the count of three, they all took a huge bite. **Yuck! Gross!** The cookies tasted so bad that each student spat out their cookie! These were the worst-tasting cookies anyone had ever eaten. Sadly, platefuls were dumped.

The poor staff couldn't figure out what went wrong. They looked very carefully at the tried and true recipe. As they looked down the list, they suddenly realized that they had forgotten the salt. Without salt, the cookies were not sweet. Chocolate doesn't taste like chocolate.

What is designed to be delicious turns into a tasteless mess when no is salt added.

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Our lives can easily be like those cookies.

It has been a little over five weeks since Christmas. The heavenly choirs were singing. Most of us focused on the manger and shared our warm memories of Christmas. Even though the days were shorter than they are now, didn't life seem lighter?

There was an air of hope and expectation. The Lord himself was about to enter our lives. Then a short time ago we were focused on the Star in the East that signified "*God with us.*"

Now it's a month later, and winter is upon us. Children are back in school. The bills are coming due and some of us have overspent. And it is cold. The days are short and dreary for so many of us. **And where the heck is spring?**

Isn't it amazing how the whole focus of our lives, and even society, have moved so far in such a short time?

Can anyone here relate to any of that? Any light we may have had in our life is dulled. It almost seems as if our light is being dimmed by a heavy bucket which we are wearing on our heads. Yet all the ingredients of a successful life appear to be within our grasp.

We may look good on the outside, but **something is missing**. The missing ingredient may show itself differently in each of us.

Perhaps one of us is unhappy. Maybe someone else is unusually is short-tempered. Sometimes there is just a quiet uneasiness. At other times that quiet uneasiness can turn into a loud roar that drowns all other sound and thought from our minds.

We desire to be like the **Psalmist** today. We want to be fearless and confident. We want to sing and shout loudly with joy. We want to feel secure and protected from our enemies. We want our lives to be prize-winning, delicious chocolate chip cookies! Full of fragrance, taste, and sweetness. We want the sweetest families, and homes, and lives.

We just caught a glimpse of that desired flavor at Christmas. Even with the rush of holiday shopping, we could feel the buzz in the air.

St. Paul echoes the Prophet Isaiah when he says life can be so good *that "no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him!"*

It is there in black and white. God has some pretty great stuff waiting for us.

So, what happened? Where did the feeling go? Can we get it back? One question before we go on. **Who set the boundaries of Christmas?**

Did God set the Christmas season or did the world?

Who said we should get into debt or overeat or be nice to Aunt Nellie or Uncle Bill only in December? Who said that Christmas shopping should start right after back-to-school and before Halloween?

Even though the church joyfully celebrates Christmas music for the twelve days of Christmas, many shoppers are tired of carols and want to hear their regular music on December 26.

Even the church has been caught up.

How many of us sing "*Joy to the World*" in June, or even today? And yet each and every time we approach God in worship it is an occasion of joy! We have let the spirit of the world dictate our recipes for light and salt.

But St. Paul reminds us that our life is not in the spirit of the world. WE HAVE RECEIVED THE SPIRIT OF GOD! It is through the Holy Spirit that we may understand the gifts of God that he has given us.

God loves to take ordinary people like you and me, and through us, does extraordinary things! He is looking for every day, willing vessels that he can equip and gift. And Jesus tells us in today's Gospel, "*You ARE the salt of the earth. You ARE the light of the world.*" Not, "*maybe you will be!*" **You ARE salt and light in this world.** He has gifted us.

Politics cannot make us whole and give us the salt of God.

Economics cannot fill our lives with joy. Our jobs and the kind of car we drive don't increase the **light** in our lives.

It is God, not the world, who must forgive our sins. Hallmark will not give us the Spirit of God. Yet we keep looking to the world for **salt** and **light**: for that burst of flavor and for that exquisite brightness. It is only through Jesus that we can we receive the Spirit of God.

We cannot make that **saltiness** on our own. The **light** of Christ carries it to us and is just that. We must go to him as our source each and every day.

If we have nice families, good furniture, comfortable homes, a good education, and good food, but do not have the Spirit of the Lord visible in our lives, then we are like those chocolate chip cookies that tasted like so much sawdust! We haven't added that pinch of

salt that is ours alone to give. It is so necessary to bring out the flavors all around us. We have watered the **salt** down.

If we let our neighbors and our possessions dictate where God is, then we will find ourselves wearing only a barrel. We will have covered over the **light** that is in us. There will be no **light** shining from our lives. Each one of us is called to let God's **light** shine through us.

That's why we're here. To be solitary candles? No. Someone said that *you never diminish the flame of your own candle by lighting the flame of another's*. In fact, that's how it's supposed to work. In the first century, they did not put out their **lights** at night. They had to keep the fire burning. If they put out all their **lights**, then the next morning people would scramble around looking for a cooking fire.

Sometimes people would put a barrel over a lamp to darken the room but still keep it burning. When we let the world dictate our lives, we are like that lamp. There may be a **light** flickering inside. No one can see it. It won't **light** a path in a dark room.

That hidden fire cannot even be shared until the barrel comes off. It is time to remove the barrel that has been put on our lives. It is time to let the Spirit of the Living Lord shine out of our lives.

Our families, our friends, our neighborhoods, our country, and even the world are desperately waiting for us to share that **light**. And while we are at it, let's add our touch of **salt** to those tasty cookies that God has made for us to share.

IN THE NAME OF THE CREATOR, CHRIST OUR LIGHT, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT...Amen