

My grandsons, especially Joey, love Yoda. Joey does a great Yoda voice. If our Gospel text for this morning was being spoken by Yoda from the Star Wars movies, he might say it like this. "Salt and light, you are."

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said to his disciples, "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled underfoot."

"You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lamp stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

"Salt and light, you are." Remember that. Why remember? Because this is very important for any and all who believe in and follow Jesus. Why?

Let's begin with salt.

For what do we use salt? (food, melt ice, ...)

How much does salt cost today? (inexpensive)

Good exegesis and exposition, fancy seminary words for biblical interpretation, begins with trying to understand what a text meant in the context of the time and culture in which it was written.

Salt meant more to people in Jesus' day than it does to us today because they used it regularly for more things than we do.

- Salt was used for taste and as a helpful nutrient in much the same way as we use it today.
- Salt preserved food. We use BHA & BHT and nitrates and nitrites. We use refrigeration, freezing and canning.
- Salt was used as a leaven, sometimes more often than yeast.
- Salt was used for healing. We may gargle with it on occasion but then it was used as an agent to cleanse flesh wounds. We know now that salt doesn't really heal. In fact, it aggravates a wound. But it does so in a way that stimulates the bodies' own systems to cleanse a wound, which indirectly promotes healing.
- In Roman culture, salt was so precious that it was used, at least in part, to pay workers. The word "salary" comes from the Latin *salarium*, a word for salt. A person not worth his or her salt was one not worthy of wages.

Thus, at the time Jesus speaks, salt was a very valuable commodity. Today, common table salt is just that - common. Then it was valuable. By calling us salt, Jesus may have been reminding us that we are of great value and precious in His sight and that we have significant purposes.

What is interesting about this and why I want you to remember that “salt you are” is because salt only works its purposes by contact. Without contact it just sits and, as Jesus said, loses its saltiness. With contact salt can bring about good and helpful change for taste, preserving and healing but left in its container it does nothing and eventually goes bad.

Thus, as salt, we need to be in contact with our society if we are to be agents for healing and preservation. “Salt you are.”

“Light you are too” says Yoda. “You are the light of the world” says Jesus. Can you imagine that? Here speaks to a motley crew of farmers and fishermen and tax collectors and housewives outside of a tiny and remote village in an obscure part of the world and Jesus was saying to them, “You are the light of the world.” Talk about a statement of faith! Light of the world? That bunch? Only Jesus could have seen that through this diverse crew God would indeed change the world forever. “You are the light of the world,” He said and so they were. So are you. So are we.

That means something. It means, first of all, that we have a responsibility for the world. That makes sense, doesn't it? We are the light of the world.

- A light house helps ships navigate away from the rocks.
- A light bulb lights up a room and folks can navigate around things or find what they are looking for.
- Light does not exist for its own glory but to brighten up a world that would otherwise be in darkness.

That is the first thing Jesus is saying to us: We have a responsibility for the world, to be and bring light into a world of darkness.

Light was the first thing God created. Some of the first words recorded in the Bible are these: “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light” (Genesis 1:3).

Scientists tell us that all matter and energy come from light and our life depends on it. Furthermore, if we were deep in the earth in a cave in which there was no light and it was pitch black, a single lit match or small flashlight would make a huge difference in what could be seen.

People in Bible times understood far more about darkness than we. Light was a luxury and a rarity. There were no streetlamps. If the streetlamp at the rectory (at Grace) is out, it is very, very dark outside at night. For folks in Jesus’ time, at nighttime, if you were traveling, the unlighted world was a scary place. Roads were treacherous and criminals plied their trade in the dark.

But darkness was not only a problem on the road. At the end of your journey, light was still a luxury. Palestinian homes were generally dark. They usually had one small window. They had no electricity and no light bulbs like we have. Their light consisted of a lamp which was a bowl filled with oil that had a wick.

When they needed light, the lamp was placed on a lamp stand. The most difficult part of having this light in the house was in lighting the lamp. Remember they didn't have matches or lighters. As a result, no one wanted to let their light go out because it took too much work to get the wick lit again. However, when people went out of the house it was dangerous to leave the light on. So, for safety reasons, when they left their homes the lamp would be taken from its lamp stand and placed under an earthen vessel where it could burn risk free.

Of course, no one lights a light only to put it under a basket or earthen vessel. That would defeat its purpose. So, as soon as someone returned to the house, they would return the light to its stand so it could shine to its maximum. Their version of turning on a light switch. Light you are, shining out in the open.

We take light against the darkness for granted ... until ice or snow storms or other incidents take down power lines. But even then, we have candles and flashlights. Hit a switch. Light! Light a match or use a lighter and a candle is lit. It's so easy we forget.

Remember, light you are, shining out in the open. With that, it's important for us to remember that we are not the source of our light.

In an article entitled "Reflect the Light," Roble Nebres tells about the time he drove to the summit of Mt. Haleakala on the island of Maui. After watching the sunset, it became dark, very dark and he became anxious about the descent down the steep, winding road. When he left the parking lot the median strips on the road suddenly came alive with reflectorized lights. They provided a much needed directional guide on the mountain road.

The reflectors illuminated the way for Nebres, who made his descent safely down the treacherous mountain road. The reflectors, however, were useless without his headlights shining on them. The light they gave depended on the light from another source. Otherwise they could not help him see.

We are like those reflectors for a great source of light. There is One who has touched our lives and given us the power and the authority to touch others. When Jesus told his disciples they were the "light of the world," He meant they were to be reflectors of the light of God. And God calls us to be reflectors of God's light to a world of darkness.

So, it is with all this in mind that we approach Christ's words about our role in the drama of redemption. "You are the light of the world," He said. What an amazing affirmation as well as a remarkable responsibility. These words were not spoken lightly, no pun intended. Just as Christ came to bring light to a world stumbling in the dark, so are we to bring His light to the world in which we live.

Light you are to bring guidance and illumination into a dark world.

Salt you are to bring preservation, leaven and healing to a wounded and wayward world.

Salt and light, you are. Go into the world and be salt and light in the name of Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen