

Hello, I'm Allen Bell, and I have attended Black Mountain Presbyterian Church for my entire life. For the newer members of the church, I might only be known as the guy who occasionally plays saxophone for the offering and barely says anything. Well, as you can see, I actually can speak! However, for some folks who have been around this church for over a decade, I may be remembered as the overly hyperactive six year old that wouldn't be quiet despite the many pleas of my parents or Sunday school teachers. In case you couldn't tell, time has definitely changed me. Actually, many factors have molded me into the more reserved and thoughtful person I am today, this church being one of them. As I grew out of my more overactive attributes, I began to become more open-minded and would get lost deep in my thoughts. This was partially due to the church's educational programs promoting critical thinking and analytical skills by reading us the bible stories and asking us to interpret them.

I owe part of who I am to this church, and around the time I started learning music, I decided that I wanted to give back to the church in my own unique way, so I started playing saxophone in worship. I could tell that I was being appreciated from the start because the members of the congregation would approach me after worship and thank me for playing. Most often, y'all might have said thanks for playing the clarinet, or trombone, but the sentiment of appreciation was apparent. And just to clear things up, it's a saxophone.

Today's passage states that we are the light of the world. This particular part speaks to me because us seniors are about to be able to spread our gifts and personalities into this unrelenting and divisive world and hopefully bring a little light into it. A lot of people have asked me if I'm nervous about going out on my own. While I am a bit anxious, I'm more excited about the prospect of living my life and bringing a bit of much-needed love out into the world.

When reading the words "you are the light of the world," I actually felt powerful. Too often do we hear that we are insignificant and that our word carries no weight, so it feels good to get a little encouragement. Keep in mind that this passage is addressing all of us, not just the youth. We are the light of the world. We are the few who, when nothing seems to be going right, keep our heads up and our eyes prideful, for we know that as long as we live, God lives. Amen.

Good morning. My name is Matt Coward.

In the passage, Jesus explains what the characteristics of a good disciple are. At the start of every attribute, there is repetition of the word “blessed”. “ **Blessed** are those conscious of their spiritual needs.” “ **Blessed** are those who mourn.” “ **Blessed** are the mild tempered.”

As some of you might know, last summer I was diagnosed with encephalitis and had an autoimmune reaction that completely flipped my life on its head. Because of my treatment, I gained twenty pounds of swelling, couldn't go to school, and had frequent panic and anxiety attacks and chronic pain. It was a very hard time of my life, and it was hard to find things to be happy about and grateful for.

When I think about this passage, I can see how my illness pushed me in some of the areas of discipleship that Jesus mentions. One of my best memories from that time was having lunch dates with a long-time member of the church, Ellen Farrior. I'd say she helped me regain consciousness of my spiritual needs. After hearing about my condition, Ellen texted me asking if we could meet and talk sometime. Being lonely all day with all my friends in school, I accepted.

The next afternoon, Ellen came over to my house and we just talked about life while enjoying a garlic-crust pepperoni pizza that she had picked up from Pizza Hut. Having this simple interaction and hearing Ellen talk about her life, hardships, and triumphs made me realize what in my life I was taking for granted even during a time where I felt like nothing could get worse. Ellen ended up coming for lunch many times and her faith and stories always gave me hope.

Over the six months that I struggled, I mourned a lot of things. The loss of playing soccer, the loss of my physique, the loss of my normally peaceful mind, the loss of not graduating from high school with my class. But I came to a point where I realized that there was nothing I could do to change these things. Instead I worked on being grateful for what I did have. I realized that I had friends and family who didn't care that I looked different. I realized that I had a loving church family, getting notes and cards wishing me well from people I barely knew. And most importantly, I realized that even though life had thrown me a curveball, my options were to give up, or to find ways to benefit from the situation I was presented with. I

started to feel motivated to come back stronger than I was before and to have a different outlook on life.

In these “beattitudes” Jesus is encouraging his followers to keep hope that things will get better. He assures them that even though times are hard now, perseverance is rewarded in the long-run.

I know that it is not always easy to look on the bright side of life and find hope in situations where everything seems to be going wrong. But I encourage you to persevere and find that hope, whether it is through faith or just over over a garlic-crust pizza. Amen

So I urge you all today to go out and really look for all the places in your life where you are blessed. Come to terms with your spiritual needs, and use them to motivate you in your faith. Don't be afraid to mourn, for it is only natural and in sorrow we find joy. And in my opinion, most importantly, be mild tempered. I know it is not always easy to do in this world we live in, but try to look on the bright side of life. Find the silver-lining when everything seems to be going wrong, and you can grow and learn from your experiences. Amen.

Good morning everyone, my name is Lily Morgan.

In the beginning of this scripture Jesus removes himself from the massive crowds that have begun following him, and he goes to the mountaintop with his disciples.

Now I see this as the moment that Jesus looks at the crowds and he just thinks “whoa. People are actually listening to me, they're following me, I have an impact, (short pause) a big impact in this world”

This was the moment that Jesus sat down and connected to both his human side and his god side asked himself what he was going to teach to these people who were willing to put down their entire lives to follow him.

As a human, Jesus may have been tempted to use his power for himself. To benefit his own interests and the ones around him. I'm certainly sure that the disciples were expecting some profit out of the whole Jesus deal. It's very human. That's how the world works isn't it? The ones who are powerful takes all the profit and leaves the rest in the dust?

But the teaching of greed was not on Jesus's agenda. **He chose to bless the meek and the merciful and those that morn. To build up the people that**

followed him and not just himself.

I joined the church through my baptism in Madison Presbyterian Church by my grandmother Molly Morgan. When I was just an infant my family chose to give me the love and support of a community they knew would teach me to uplift others and build a better world together. I joined Black Mountain Presbyterian Church when I was only a year old. Here I became a part of the Sunday school classes and the Weekday school.

The weekday school to me was and still is one of life's great adventures. There I joined kids that I had never met before, teachers that I knew nothing about, in a place that was brand new. They knew almost nothing about me as well, but those kids and those teachers are **still** part of my life. These were the people, besides my ever-loving parents, that taught me to share. to care. and to love. This was a place I came to create and invent. Those teachers gave me the selfless gift love that founded who I grew to be. One of the only toys that I still have from my childhood is a lamb that Mrs. Tuttle gave to me. Her name is lammy. I was very creative at naming things (bring lamb)

Talking about giving gifts, Jesus stood on the mountain and decided what he was going to give these people.

Jesus looked at the faces of the men he chose to follow him and he looked at the faces of the thousands who needed **someone** to believe in. Someone to give them light and hope and a reason to keep believing in good. Because sometimes it's **really really hard** to believe in good in a world that can be so dark. Jesus looked out over the crowd and then. He turns to his disciples and he says "These are the people we need to build up. This is the future we need to support."

As I grew up in the church, I went to LOGOS I participated in choir. and I heard so many stories. The most powerful thing about the bible to me is that the underlying message is always one of **love**. loving yourself. the world. others. just love. I heard so many bible verses and at first I never understood. but that's why the church is here. to help us understand.

I met so many beautiful people who told me what they saw in the scripture so that I could consider what scripture would teach me. and people like mike barker who taught me that scripture is not only words but music as well. and Donna Marie who taught me that the stories on the page come to life if you can step into the them.

The church instilled in me a passion for art, music, theater, and critical thinking that I still hold dear today.

I can imagine there was some confusion from the disciples. but I believe the overall feeling was one of **YES**. that feeling you get when every inch of your being knows you are doing the right thing. I have faith they knew that this way of loving and living was the right thing to teach and learn. I profoundly hope that they saw the possibilities of what you can build if you build with people and not on them.

I was built by this church, through art, caring, laughter, lessons, and love. Through playground fun, service work, bible study, youth group, potato lunches, and so much more. Just like Jesus decided to build up his followers that day on the mountain top, this church, **you**, decided to build me up into the person I am today and I will always be thankful for that love.

Amen.

Good Morning, I'm Vance Stiles. The second half of today's verses discuss two images, the first of which is focused on how we, as Christians are the salt of the earth. In the Message translation, we are said to be the "salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. Basically, as Christians, we are called to be and bring out the "God-taste" of the world. But what does this really mean? How do we spread this salt? And just like with food, can we be too salty?

This idea of "salty people" is abstract, if you ask most teenagers what it means in today's vernacular to call someone salty, they'll tell you that that person is bitter or angry. So, this translation of what it means to be a salty person doesn't really seem to fit with what we have in the text. We're not supposed to be the bitterness to the rest of the world, but this abstract, god-salt. Maybe these salty people are the ones who make you realize God's presence on earth through their actions and words. They don't have to be bible-thumping declarers of the word and of salvation, but those who act out the message that Jesus gave to us.

My first example of a salty person is Beverly Highland. I first got to know Beverly in Elder/ Deacon training at Margaret Torrence's house. This was my first real foray into Church leadership, and I was feeling very out of my element. Beverly saw this in me, and started cracking jokes about how we were going to "turn this whole thing into a party". That transformed my anxious energy into

relaxing laughter. Ever since then, whenever I see Beverly, I am sure I'm going to smile or laugh and have an uplifted spirit from my interaction with her. Beverly is pure salt. She brings out the message that Jesus proclaimed, a message of love and joy to the world, making those god-tastes even more prominent.

Example of "salty" person number two. Coach Chisholm. He is one of my cross country coaches that I've been running with for three years. Coach Chisholm runs with us for the majority of our long runs, and he and I have gotten into many long discussions on runs. These discussions can be about just the day's events for something deeper. When you know you're going to have an hour of uninterrupted time with someone, it allows for a space of open conversation to occur. Coach Chisholm's "saltiness" is found in his openness, and receptiveness. On these long runs with him I've had a space to talk out many issues and process them. This is another form of "saltiness", of extended openness and guidance.

A third salty person would have to be our associate pastor, Berry French. Some members of the church, and especially the youth group might say at certain moments that he has a little too much salt going on. But one can ever be too salty. Berry is a combination of the two other salty people I have mentioned, possessing an abundance of infectious energy along with the ability to listen. He loves to spread his salt so much; one might say he a-salts others. He has helped me figure out what my salt is thought discussion and action and where it can be used.

I've learned that my salt is most easily spread through participating in many youth activities. Being a small group and rec leader at Massanetta Springs Middle school conference has been the place for me to discover my salt. I've seen my saltiness bring others to see their own through energizers and small group discussion, through massive all conference dances and one-on-one conversations. I've been blessed to already be able to see how easy it is to spread my salt this early in life, and hope to continue doing the same.

Take the time to seek out your salty people wherever you are in life. Those salty people, by enriching you and making your world more flavorful give you the opportunity to do the same for others. In more concise words found in First John Chapter 4 verse twelve, "No one has ever seen God: if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us."-Spreading-our salt encourages other to spread theirs. So spread your salt, and flavor the community around you.

Amen.