

Theme: - Salt of the earth and light of the world

When Jesus said that we were the salt of the earth he gave us a saying which has come into everyday use. It provided people with an expression which is one of the greatest complements that can be bestowed on anyone. When we want to stress someone's worth and usefulness in our community, we say to them, "You are the salt of the earth." In a Christian context it means that the miracle of transformation to a disciple of Christ has already begun. But that wasn't the reason that Jesus gave us that expression.

In January John spoke about renewal of our commitment to Christ and of our commitment to St Michael's church. He spoke about our declining numbers in church especially following covid.

Years ago, I played chess regularly and then I became church warden. The chess club plus my day job and being church warden was too much, so I stopped playing chess. The chess club said that if I stopped I would never return, but I said I would because I loved playing. But they were right, I never did return because I was now doing other things. One reason people are now not coming to church may well be because they are doing other things; now chess isn't important but having a relationship with God is important and should be of the highest priority.

Now Jesus foresaw this problem 2,000 years ago when he said in verse 13, "You are the Salt of the earth." Jesus uses everyday things and expressions to illustrate the kingdom of heaven and to make valid points, and here he uses salt, which was highly valued in Jesus's day as a preserver, and transformer of food as indeed it still is. Jesus uses this expression in the middle of his sermon on the mount, for his disciples and others who were listening to his sermon and who were being transformed.

Now, salt when it is still in its packet isn't a transformer or preserver of food, it only becomes a transformer or preserver when we mix a small quantity with our food. In the same way Christians sitting alone in the comfort of their homes are unlikely to make disciples of Christ.

We, like salt, need to mix with other people both in church and outside of church so that we can introduce them to Christ, and as John said in his sermon in January, it's a job for each and every one of us, because we all have our own journey of faith which we can share with others. Sharing our faith with others can be difficult but a good place to start is in a house group where you know you are sharing your faith with friends.

You may say but how does mixing with people in church make a difference, after all they are already believers, but as brothers and sisters in Christ, we need to remain in fellowship with each other to maintain the family bond and to continually hear the good news of Christ.

Salt then is a perfect metaphor for the people of God: and we have a responsibility to spread the gospel, to make a big difference in the world, and we will only do that if we mix with other people both in church and outside in the community that is what Jesus meant when calling us the salt of the earth.

The second half of verse 13 reads, “but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored?” “It is no longer good for anything.” To lose one’s taste or passion for something is to cast it aside; now since, as I have said, salt is the perfect metaphor for a Christian, then by inference we are casting off our Christian faith which is why we would then be good for nothing when it comes to spreading the gospel of Christ.

Verse 14 reads, “You are the light of the world.” Last week Jane spoke about light when she said “We are to learn to live as the children of the light, and the light is the light of Christ who came to dispel the darkness.” These days it is quite possible to have no concept of real darkness. I once went down a coal mine and when we had travelled a little way towards what was once the coal face we were asked to switch off our helmet lights, that was real darkness where my relationship with things and people became lost in the darkness.

Now in the new Testament Jesus often uses the phrase ‘of the world’ to mean, ‘not of God’ Now the world without God would be in spiritual darkness. In Matthew chapter 27 from verse 45 and 46 we have these words, “From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until 3 in the afternoon. And about 3 o’clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, “My God My God, why have you forsaken me.” At that moment in time, without God, Jesus was not only in physical darkness but by far more distressingly he was in spiritual darkness, so much so that in his distress he cried out in a loud voice, “My God my God, why have you forsaken me.

In John chapter 3 verse 16 we have, “God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.” Jesus has appointed us to bring light to dispel the spiritual darkness of this world. It is a sacred duty.

On a slightly different tact, Jesus said, “No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all the house.” Now a bushel basket will shade the light but not extinguish it. Therefore, in spreading the gospel of Christ, we are not to seek glory for ourselves, neither are we to be invisible. We are to be the light of the world, in what we say and do, so that people who we come into contact with will turn to Christ. Christ himself said, “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven. Good works are done with love, and if we love one another, our love will be manifested in acts of care and mercy. Such acts are highly effective ways to give God glory.

People who reject the church cannot easily dismiss the witness of those who devote themselves to the service of others. Sacrificial love draws people to Christ, and every community has its saints who devote themselves quietly and powerfully to the service of those in need. Christ intends each of us to be a light, some smaller and some larger, but all shining brightly, a thousand points of light, a million points of light! If every Christian had their light turned on, this world would be quite a different place!

In verse 17 Jesus turns his attention to the Old Testament law, when he said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil.” This is such an important statement that Jesus made, it means that the Old Testament remains the cornerstone, the foundation of our faith. This is why we usually have an Old Testament reading every Sunday and quite often have the Old Testament as the subject of our sermons. Jesus didn’t say anything during his ministry which went against the Old

Testament, indeed everything he said supported it, or as Jesus said fulfilled it. Verse 18 reinforces Jesus' statement regarding the Old Testament when he said that the Old Testament will not be altered until all is accomplished.

Now the law is the first five books of the Old Testament the prophets were people chosen by God to speak for him, to deliver his words of judgment and grace, people such as Ezekiel. The law and the prophets together symbolize the whole will of God. They were intended to guide the people faithfully so that they could live within the will of God and enjoy God's blessings. "Therefore, whoever breaks or annuls one of the least of these laws or commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called the least in the kingdom of heaven;" Conversely those who not only keep the law but also teach others to do the same will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus said that because the scribes prided themselves on their ability to interpret the law correctly, and the Pharisees prided themselves on keeping the law in all of its detail. However, in 1 John 1: verse 8 St John wrote, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." It follows therefore that despite what they said the Scribes and Pharisees did sin even if they thought otherwise which is why Jesus was continually calling them hypocrites..

There are of course many instances of the Pharisees breaking the law for example in Matthew 6 verse 2 reads, "So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do." And when Jesus used the word hypocrite he of course meant the Pharisees. Sadly, we will probably, or certainly, turn out to be no better than the Scribes or Pharisees, but hopefully there will be a distinct difference between them and us. And the difference should be that we will know that we are sinners, and that in our grief and in true repentance we will humbly seek God's forgiveness and he will forgive us and open up for us a creative future preventing us from becoming, 'good for nothing.'

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