

St Marc Grenoble

Sunday 5th February 2023

Isaiah 58: 1 - 9A

Matthew 5: 13 - 20

'Salt and Light'

Good morning, Welcome to all of you both here in church and those joining on Zoom - Wakey, wakey - Rise and Shine!!

Let's Pray -

As usual, let's spend a few minutes listening to some of your reflections on our readings this morning. What caught your attention??? ... Thank you

Now, I'd like some help with this morning's theme: Please can you give me some uses for salt? **[Uses for salt? – enhance/ bring out flavour. Preserving foods, esp. meat. As an antiseptic / healing agent.]** Thank you

Funny, isn't it? Salt doesn't have an outstanding taste itself, and yet it makes so many things like stews, meats, + **PORRIDGE!** taste so much better. You could say it sharpens the taste buds. (One criticism of many packet foods is that they have too much salt.) Remember, a little salt should go a long way!

But, salt that is no longer fresh, or too old, simply loses its saltiness, becomes tasteless and is useless – nothing to do except throw it away!

In Old Testament times, salt was used by conquering armies as a long - term punishment on nations they'd conquered. They spread salt on the land used to grow food, so that as a result nothing would grow and the people would struggle with hunger for a very long time.

They also spread salt on cities they had conquered and destroyed, which was apparently a way of ritually cursing anyone who tried to rebuild the city within 150 years. (Sometimes called 'sowing with salt') Abimilech did this when he conquered Shechem around 1250 BC. (See Judges 9:45) I'm told the Romans also sometimes did this to places they conquered.

In our Gospel reading, (I esp. like this Message translation), Jesus says 'Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be salt seasoning' He not only suggests that our 'saltiness' brings out the flavour of our Godliness; but that is one of our main purposes. It is not 'If you feel like it, please will you add some seasoning to life?' It is 'You are here to be the salt that brings out the 'God-flavours' of this earth.

Jesus is calling us, He's telling us we are here to ensure that those around us may experience God-flavours, or if you like a real experience of God's presence.

And, He continues 'If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness?' You've lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage.

I don't know about you, but I want to be useful and to serve God as He expects - I certainly don't want to end up in His holy garbage can!

Of course, we strive to be Godly, but inevitably we'll fall short – we're human. But our Christian 'saltiness' can be excellent seasoning, to bring out the Godly flavour of faith in our community. It's to do with the way the flavour of our faith flows through our workaday lives; – like being just that bit more honest, or that bit more caring, or that bit more cheerful and loving in our home, in our class or our workplace.

As Christian 'salt' in our community, we have a wonderful opportunity to enhance, or strengthen the true flavour of faith in our society. Sharpening the tastebuds of faith!

What do we use light for? (remember, Jesus was probably talking about a little oil lamp!! It's amazing how much light an oil lamp can produce.)

We use a light to help us see what we're doing, - to see what's around us, to help us search for something; but it is also used as a beacon, or direction finder to guide others towards – or in the case of a lighthouse away from – something.

It's amazing how just one little light can shine out in the darkness; as anyone who's lived through a war will know! That's why in the UK in WW 2, there were blackout wardens, ensuring no-one allowed even tiny chinks of light to show, which may guide enemy aircraft where to drop their bombs.

In Isaiah (49:6) God said to His people, I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.

Jesus used the word picture of a city on a hill, shining out – with just a lot of little oil lamps, guiding people towards it – like a beacon. If you need a light, you don't hide it under a bucket – or basket – When you put the light under a bucket, or a bed, **y**ou can't see it. ** Tell story of my cousins hiding candle under bed 'til bedtime!! **

You need it to be uncovered and raised up to get maximum visibility for whatever you are doing.

The Message translation also tells us we are here to be light – bringing out the God-colours in the world. God and His love for us isn't a secret to be kept; in fact just the reverse: Jesus tells us to proclaim – to tell out the Good News to all people.

Lights don't usually make a sound, yet they manage to proclaim – they shine out news of a presence over a much greater distance than any megaphone! I find the idea of being a silent beacon for my faith quite challenging. (some of you may well like me to be a *silent* beacon!)

But it's a salutary thought that our lives should be beacons leading others not only towards faith, but towards the love of Jesus himself. Put it another way, the purpose of our light in the day to day world is to lead others towards Jesus.

That is a very big commission, it may be challenging, but that is clearly what Jesus is calling us to do: we are here as His representatives to bring salt and light, flavour and vision to the people around us in our community every day.

Here's something for you to Chew over! Does the light of my life, or our fellowship, lead others towards Jesus? Does the salt of my life help others to taste and see that God is good? Or does my behaviour scare them away??

In the 2nd part of the reading, Jesus talks about 'the Law and the Prophets'. Some people think the 'Law' refers only to the Ten Commandments, which God gave Moses on Mt Sinai, when He called him to a 'face to face' meeting. We can read them in Exodus 20.

But, in fact, almost the entire Book of Exodus contains God's instructions for the way He wanted, and still wants His 'covenant people' to behave, to live and to honour Him and each other.

In the Torah, the five 'law' books of the Old Testament, there are three kinds of law: Ceremonial Law, related to worship; Civil Law, related to daily living; and Moral Law (for which the Ten Commandments is the basis), reveals the nature and will of God.

Much of this rule book is still the basis for the laws of many countries around the world - even if the people don't realise it.

Then there are the books of the Prophets, which give us stories about the nature, character and wonder of God and some amazing stories of His servants' incredible exploits, walking and working with Him; such wonderful bedtime reading!

Our Old Testament reading from Isaiah was talking along the same lines - Don't hold back, shout out and tell people how they have rebelled against God's ways.

Don't loosely follow the letter of the law and pretend you are serving God; don't make hollow sacrifices and fasts to hide your sins; but put your faith into action - by caring for the oppressed, the hungry and the homeless - then the light of your life will shine out, you will be healed and the Lord will answer your call for help.

Jesus makes the point very clearly that He didn't come to abolish what the law and the prophets teach us, but to fulfil or develop their teaching, allowing it to spread into the whole of our lives.

Following Jesus is not just about following the letter of the law (which is what the Pharisees often did) but allowing God's true sense of purpose and direction impact completely on the way we live – it isn't easy and we cannot do it on our own.

We must ask for the input of the Holy Spirit to help us live life, with Jesus' and with His Way at the centre of our lives.

This week's challenge / question to chew over is to ask yourself whether you give the Holy Spirit enough space or freedom of movement to change you and make a real difference in your life and the lives of those around you??

So now, as I close, let's Pray: Come Holy Spirit ...