

SALT AND LIGHT

Isaiah 58. 1-8a

1 Corinthians 2. 1-12

Matthew 5. 13-20

I speak to you in the name of  the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

I wonder: how do you answer the question, ‘Who are you?’ The most common answer is to give our name. We might also tell a bit of family history and the connections that help identify us. Often we’ll tell something about our work, the things we do and how we spend our time. I cannot, however, think of a single time when I ever answered that question by saying, ‘Oh, I’m the salt of the earth. I’m the light of the world.’ How about you? Have you ever answered that way? Has anyone ever answered you that way? I’m guessing probably not.

And why not? Even if we’ve never said it aloud, do we ever think of ourselves that way? Do we know that about ourselves? Our Lord knows that about us. Jesus thinks that about us; and he even says that about us. It’s right there in today’s gospel passage (Matthew 5. 13-20).

‘You are the salt of the earth.... You are the light of the world.’ Don’t make the error of thinking that this is about someone other than you. Christ isn’t talking to particular individuals. He’s talking to the crowds that have followed him from Galilee, from the ten cities known as the Decapolis; from Jerusalem; from Judea; and from beyond the Jordan River. That means they’ve come from everywhere. They’ve come to see this one they’ve heard about. They’ve come to listen and learn, to be healed, and to have their lives put back together. They’ve come in search of meaning, direction, and purpose.

And you and I also stand among that crowd. We're one of them. We've come today to see this one we've heard about. We've come to listen and learn, to be healed and to have our lives put back together. We've come in search of meaning, direction and purpose. Our Lord's words are as true and applicable today as they were two thousand years ago. 'You are the salt of the earth.... You are the light of the world.'

Jesus doesn't stop there, however. There are profound implications to being named salt and light. It means that we are to *flavour the world*. We are to season and transform human activity in such a way that it reveals God in this world. It means that we are to help people better see God's life in theirs. It means that we are to *enlighten* the dark places of the world. You and I are the means by which God *flavours and illuminates* life and the world. If the gospel reading from last week, the Feast of the Presentation, showed us to be God-receivers, this week's gospel shows and calls us to be God-givers and God-sharers.

Christ has given us the salt and light of his divinity not just for ourselves, but that others might (figuratively) eat and see better. The salt of divinity that was poured into our hands we are to sprinkle onto the world. The light of divinity that fills our hearts and minds is to shine on and brighten all of life.

So what does that look like? What does that mean for us? In fact, it is actually very practical and tangible. It's something that can be tasted and seen. It makes a difference in the world and to other people.

It is, for example, looking at another person in the eyes, speaking a kind word, and acknowledging him or her as having been created in the image and likeness of God.

It is showing commitment to others by listening, being available and spending time with them.

It is starting a conversation and rebuilding a relationship when what you mostly feel is indifference, pain or anger.

It is praying that God will bless with good gifts those who have hurt you, those who are different to you and those with whom you disagree.

It is choosing a life of self-giving rather than taking and acquiring; choosing vulnerability rather than defensiveness; and intimacy rather than isolation.

It is being generous with your compassion, time and money to care for and make a difference in the lives of the poor, the hungry and the homeless.

Where is the salt and light in our lives? What does it look like? How does it show up? There are probably as many expressions and manifestations of salt and light as there are people. Ultimately though, they always look like the life of Jesus.

To live as salt of the earth and light of the world is to know our deepest, truest and most authentic self. It is the life we long for, and the life that God desires us to have. It is both *who we are* and *how we are to be*. That's why our Lord is so adamant that we not lose our saltiness and that we not hide our light.

To do so is to lose and hide our life. To do so, in some way, denies Christ. Salt that has no flavour and light that is hidden are worthless. They're not really themselves. They are neither true nor authentic. They're not real. That's neither what we want nor what God intends for us. No one says, 'Pass the salt please,' hoping that that the flavour of their food will stay the same. And no one walks into a room, flips the switch and hopes that the light won't come on.

If we are salt and if we are light, then we ought to be tasted and seen by the world. If our relationships are bland and flavourless, if our world is dark and filled with shadows, maybe we've not been faithful to, or trusting of our own saltiness and light.

Regardless of where we are in life or in our faith, I think we are all looking for the salt and the light within us and want to know how we can best be that for others.

'You are the salt of the earth.... You are the light of the world.'

With those words, our Lord is declaring what already is. He is making a statement of fact. This does not mean that we must become something we're not already. It means we are to become, live into and manifest what we already are. That is both the good news and the challenge: to believe and become what we already are. It is some of our most difficult and most important work.

It is as if Jesus were saying in today's gospel, 'Behold the salt *that you already are*. Behold the light *that you already are*. Become that for the life of the world. Let them taste and see.'

I can't tell you how to do that. It will be unique to each of our lives. It will be particular and specific to our individual circumstances and relationships. I don't exactly know what you will do, where you will sprinkle your salt, or where you will shine your light, but I know this. In whatever ways you do that, wherever you do that, on whomever you do that, you will reveal the embodiment of God in humanity, God with us. In that moment, we and those around us will taste life and see the world as never before.

Let them taste and see, for *you* are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Amen.