

"You are the Salt of the earth... You are the light of the world... 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. Two incredibly valuable resources and quite powerful images. Both salt and light are common place in our society but still highly valuable. We have harnessed light through to flick of a switch to see our way through the dark, and we use salt which we contain and grind to unlock flavours within our foods. Within the Sermon on the Mount we hear this morning, before we hear these two images of salt and light, these images of power and hope and flavour, we hear the beatitudes. In fact if we read the end of the beatitudes it might give us more context as to who Jesus is addressing and the possible need of salt and light, of power, hope and flavour.

"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you, falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. You are the salt of the earth"

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is addressed to a particular people, Israel, which finds itself returned from exile, but still captive to the empire, oppressed and suffering. Jesus addresses a people striving to keep its cultural and religious identity while being oppressed. It is worth remembering that, as a Jewish Teacher, Jesus, in preaching the beatitudes and proclaiming the task of showing light to the world, is preaching as a Jew to Israel.

Now, Judaism in the time of Jesus, was made up of four sects, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Essenes and the Zealots. Jesus, is speaking to an audience, who were divided with how to live out their faith in oppression. The Zealots wanted to fight against the empire, the Sadducees wanted to cooperate with the empire, the Pharisees wanted to rigidly keep their religious identity by practicing their faith in isolation and the Essenes wanted to practice their faith by completely withdrawing from society into the desert. Jesus, however, encourages them and addresses his followers as one, you are the salt of the earth. Now salt, in a Jewish setting, is highly important.

As well as giving flavour to food, within Judaism salt is a symbol of the covenant between God and his people, Israel. When Jesus says you are the Salt of the earth, he speaks to a people riven with questions about how to live out their faith in oppression. Jesus encourages his audiences, reminding them of their heritage, of their connection with God, "You are the Salt of the Earth!" but also, Jesus in his preaching, is challenging his audience, Israel, to **be** Israel. To be a nation that proclaims the good news of the Kingdom come near, in the face of oppression. Jesus, proclaims a middle way, of living as a Jewish nation, of shining the light of the Gospel of love throughout the world, almost forgetting oppression altogether, love conquers all.

Jesus once reminding his audience of their convenient with God, by describing them as, the salt of the earth, then says "You are the light of the world... let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your father in heaven." There is darkness in life and Jesus encourages his followers to bring their light of love, not just to those around them, but to the world. While the sects of Judaism of Jesus' time were struggling with living out their faith, Jesus gives encouragement, and empowers them, in the face of their oppression, to live out their Jewish faith in public, in order that they may shine a light into a world of darkness.

However what does this mean to us today. To be the salt of the Earth? To be the light of the World?

Bishop Graham Tomlin, the Bishop of Kensington, has written a book called Widening the Circle. The foundation of this book is about God choosing and blessing a part of creation in order for it, not to be set apart, or to put it on a pedestal but to bless the whole of creation of which it is a part. Tomlin says that "Election is never for privilege but always for blessing. The chosen are selected to be divine means of bringing blessing to the whole of which they are a part."

In one of our Eucharistic Prayers we call to mind Christ's death on the cross, his perfect sacrifice made once for the sins of the whole world and that through his suffering he won for God a Holy people.

A Holy people is not a people who are arrogant or exclusively set apart. But a people who are blessed in order to bless the world. God chose Abraham in order to bless those around him. God chose his people and took them from slavery to freedom that they might bless the world. To be the salt of the earth, to give it flavour, to bless it. To be blessed is not to be detached from what it is not blessed. Being blessed is to bless.

While Jesus encouraged and empowered his followers, to bless creation with their light, to give flavour to the world, he too calls the church to bless the world. At the end of this service Paul will bless you in God's name as he is so called to do, and I will send you out, that you may go and bless the world, showing the gospel of love, shining light in the face of darkness.

William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury who died in office in 1944 once said "The church is the only organization on earth that exists for those who are not its members" I think to say the church is the only organization might be pushing it now, however the sentiment remains true. Jesus' words, "no one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house" speaks into this. The light that we the church can give, is there not for the joy of the church alone, not to only fill the interior of a bushel basket, but to shine out in the world. A voice of faith, hope and love. Through contributing to the work of Devizes Open Door, Omnes, The Mothers Union, The Wildlife Trust, The Rotary Club, The Lions or Help the Aged, through volunteering in charity shops, through random acts of kindness and so many other examples that I know many of us here do, we add flavour to this world, we can be as a shining light in the darkness. We encourage faith, hope and love.

We are the Salt of the earth...

We are the light of the world...

let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your father in heaven.

Amen