

Reading: Matthew 5:13-16 (NT page 969)

Reader: Sandra Martin

Background to the reading

OUR reading this morning deals with two different issues with the same message. In metaphorical language Jesus is telling his disciples what He expects them to be and do in the world.

To them the metaphors meant a lot and they understood the meaning behind them. Salt were very important in Biblical times and they used it for a variety of things such as:

- A preservative to keep meat fresh in the absence of fridges,
- as a flavoring agent in food,
- As a token of friendship you would hand someone a bag of salt. Covenants were generally confirmed by sacrificial meals and salt was always present. Since, too, salt is a preservative, it would easily become symbolic of an enduring covenant. David received his kingdom forever from God by a “covenant of salt” according to 2 Chronicles 13:5.
- All meat-offerings were seasoned with salt,
- For cleansing purposes,
- To eat salt with one was to partake of his hospitality,
- Even new-born children were rubbed with salt;

But the salt Jesus is talking about is most probably salt that they got from the Dead Sea which lost its essence by exposure, and became asphalt, with which pavements and roads were made. So the salt Jesus is referring to was impure and not salty any more. It was worthless and could only be used to make roads. It could not be made into salt ever again!

I think the second metaphor must have been a surprise to the first listeners of Matthew’s Gospel. Usually in the Old Testament light was associated with God and his word, with salvation, with goodness, with truth, with life. The New Testament support these themes, so that the holiness of God is presented in such a way that it is said that God “lives in unapproachable

light”. The Jews also regarded themselves as the people of the Light and Jerusalem as the city of Light. Jesus is saying to his disciples, his *followers* that they are the Light of the world and that they must show the world openly that they received the Light. The city that cannot be hidden was most probably Jerusalem or it may be any elevated city at night, whose torch lights would make it visible to the surrounding countryside.

They must let their Light shine everywhere like a lamp that gives light to the whole house. Jesus is referring to wicker oil lamps which gave little light in the average home, which had few windows. They were more effective by being set on a lamp stand. Something large placed over them would presumably extinguish the light altogether.

The meaning: A disciple of the kingdom who does not live like a disciple of the kingdom is worth about as much as tasteless salt or invisible light. Christians have been illuminated by the light that is Christ, who dwells within his people. If they ignore the illumination he brings and live like those in the dark, then indeed they are in deep darkness. They are worse than others because they know what light is and what it can mean to them, and have turned away from it.

MP 1201

Christ be our light

MP 315

I will sing the wondrous story

Sermon

The text verse for the sermon is verse 16: “In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

Jesus is telling us as his followers that we received a light from Him namely our faith and we must show it everywhere we go. We must be like salt who can change the taste of a whole meal.

What does it mean?

It means that all of us, you and me are lights shining in the darkness every time we show our faith through deeds of thanksgiving and praise to God, through deeds of love and deeds of extending His kingdom on this earth.

We are like different lights. We can be electric lights, torches, lamps, candles, matches. But sometimes our batteries get flat, our matches get wet, our lamps run out of oil, and our electric light bulbs just blow.... And then we tend to just sit and wait for the right time to become a light again. For some this wait can be a week, for others months and even years. Because we tend to think, ah well I am just one light among many others. Surely No One will miss me....

Our congregation is among the few where the pews are full of people every week. Our congregation is described by the recent Presbytery review team as “a congregation with many strengths and very few weaknesses”. You and I are part of the congregation. Each one of us makes up the sum of the congregation. Each one of us is a light that must shine.

Forgive me dear congregation but I have to say this. if we all of us, all of 350 members on the roll are not going let our lights shine, we will see a downwards trend of lights going out one by one in the way we are CHURCH in this Parish. Batteries will be getting flatter and flatter without new batteries and new torches coming forward. Candles will be getting shorter with no other candles replacing them. Yes and soon the wick in the lamps will be totally snuffed out. less and less people are willing to take up new tasks. It will be reality once the darkness is surrounding us. All of us must help to run the day to day business of this CHURCH.

Why my beloved people do we have to advertise vacancies week by week? Why do I have to beg people to come forward and lead the holiday club? Why do I have to ask people to help with serving coffees and teas? Why do I have only three people in East Calder helping with the projector duties? Why do I have to tell you to think of adjusting your debit orders or your gift offerings to the church on a year to year basis? Why my beloved people, is there no waiting lists for people who wants to be involved?

I had two meetings this week with people from two different Christian organisations who want to set up community outreach projects but I am afraid we cannot commit to it because we do not have enough volunteering people to make it possible!

Can you imagine when all our lights go out, the amount of accidents that will happen here right under our noses? Can you imagine when we cannot offer hospitality through a cup of tea after services? Can you imagine that we do not offer the children of this Parish an opportunity to meet our Lord and Saviour in a real and personal way at the Holiday club?

Can you imagine dear congregation what you and I will answer when the Lord asks us one day: “Why did you not let your light shine?”

We as a congregation have become complacent. We think well it seems everything is just going fine and I am just one of many. We do not think that each one of us is a light that must shine. We are getting tired because we forgot who is the source of our strength.

God’s Holy Spirit is the electric source, the battery loader, the wick, the gas and the match. We just need to switch the light on, put in the batteries, light the match, turn the lamp on. There is no more excuse why we cannot be the light in this Parish. God’s Holy Spirit is a reality in and all around us, challenging us, enabling us to let our lights shine.

It will be real shame when our lights go out completely just because we have forgotten the command of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It will be a tragedy when we as a congregation become one that means nothing to its community, when we are not the Light of this Parish. It will be disaster when we as a congregation have lost our purpose and mission in our community. May we never forget the words of the prophecy of Isaiah 42 who said of the coming servant of the Lord:

42 “Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen one in whom I delight;

I will put my Spirit on him
and he will bring justice to the nations.
2 He will not shout or cry out,
or raise his voice in the streets.
3 A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.”

May we all remember that He is the source for us to let our lights shine!
May we all remember that it is a huge privilege to be a LIGHT for God. So
let us join hands in unison, lets be ignited again by God’s Spirit. Let us help
one another to find the match again, the electric switch which is God.

In this church we have all the gifts to make a huge difference in this dark
world. Let us ask God to help us to discover what our personal gifts are
and utilise them in this congregation because we can, because we have to
because God loved us first.

Amen

Let us pray:

Lord,

May we shed the light of encouragement
where there is disappointment;
the light of integrity where there is corruption;
the light of clarity where there is uncertainty;
the light of challenge where there is complacency;
the light of acceptance where there is rejection.
And may we always walk and pray and serve
in the light of humility and in the strength of your name,
that others may see you in us and give you the glory.
We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen