

Salt and Light

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[0 : 00] You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. Two images at the beginning of what's known as Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and two images it's worth Steph, Charlie and Tim holding on to as they confirm, say yes to the promises made at their baptism on their behalf and as you publicly stand up for what you believe, declare yes, I want to belong to the church, the people of God, publicly declare, say yes to Jesus' call to follow him throughout your life.

And they're two images worth us all holding on to. As we all continue to follow Jesus ourselves or turn to him, think about it, turn to him.

And also as we go into a fourth year continuing to be impacted by COVID in what continues to be a significant time of disruption and change for people, COVID has really brought home for us how technology can be a driver for radical change, radical innovation.

A lot of things we've taken for granted are partly how you join a church is something that I took for granted, you turned up. And we heard Ruth talk about a different way of joining church.

And of course there's been people who just how we, what we mean by going to work has changed, hasn't it?

[1 : 47] Technology has transformed that with people choosing to work from home. The other driver for radical change, radical innovation is meaning.

And tonight those being confirmed will be declaring, I turn to Christ, I repent, turn away from my sins.

That's the key baptismal promise. And it's declaring a radical change, a radical reorientation of your life from selfish living and all that's false and unjust, that is putting yourself as number one and everything flowing from that, changing completely where you find meaning, that it is in Christ, following Jesus, putting him first, and all that that means.

Today's gospel reading follows the striking introduction to the Sermon on the Mount in verses 3 to 12, what we know as the Beatitudes.

And they'll be worth, and I'll come back to that later, they're worth going home and reading. And just as the Beatitudes weren't new, rather a reflection of the Old Testament, so it is with what we've heard tonight.

[3 : 08] Jesus was giving a direct challenge, a direct challenge in the style of the prophets such as Isaiah, to the world of his day. Jesus is calling the Israel of his day to be Israel.

The Israel, the people of God they were meant to be now that he's here. And yet in doing so, he was completely transforming their understanding of what that meant.

God had called Israel to be the salt of the earth. But the problem was Israel was behaving like everyone else.

There was politics going on. There was revolution going on. Jesus says, You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?

It's no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. Salt is a distinctive taste.

[4 : 21] Think of chips without salt. Terrible. The other thing, of course, it did particularly in the ancient world is it kept things from going bad.

That was actually the main function of salt in the ancient world. Think of it a bit like a refrigerator. Well, if Israel... So it was about...

Israel was actually about being a light as we'll go on. But it's actually about keeping the world... God was wanting to keep the world from going bad.

And if Israel, his chosen people, had lost their saltiness, they were his chosen salt. Where were we?

In the same way, God called Israel to be the light of the world. Israel was the people through whom God intended to shine his bright light into darkness.

[5 : 20] Yes, showing up evil, but also giving people a light, a way to follow, a light in the darkness.

You are the light of the world. He's warning them. He's also challenging them. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl.

Instead, they put it on its stand. And it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

God chose Israel so that through them, he would bring justice and mercy to the nations around. The city set on a hill is Jerusalem.

The idea was that the nations could come to Jerusalem and learn God's ways, God's law, what we know have in the Old Testament scriptures.

[6 : 33] Jerusalem was supposed to be a beacon of hope to the world. And God's followers, God's people were to be like that. They were meant to be, in their seeking to live out God's law, God's way, they were meant to be a sign to the nations around that the one God, the creator, the God of Israel, was God and to be worshipped.

Just like this church, this church you're declaring you want to belong to, is to be a beacon of hope, a sign to the community here in Doncaster and whoever else you're in contact with, that Jesus is Lord and is to be worshipped as such.

Yet Israel in Jesus' day wasn't living this calling, this vocation. Of course there were many wise and godly Jewish people.

But the nation as a whole had quite a different agenda. They actually wanted to see God's judgment on the world. Very effective from a human perspective, especially in terms of Rome, whom they were under the rule of.

Understandable, but not particularly faithful. The question for us this evening is, as Steph, Charlie and Timothy, you look to grow into the person God wants you, has designed you to be, as you grow in your desire to be used by God, as you look to live out being the salt and light to do good deeds, looking for opportunities to serve, to discover your vocation, your calling as a Christian, what it means for you to be Christ's ambassador in the world.

[8 : 34] And the question for us, as you look to be God's people here, now and on into the future, are we keeping in our sights what Israel had lost sight of?

For salt to preserve meat, it needs to be in contact with meat. It needs to be applied. It's the same with light.

Light needs to be in contact with darkness. Otherwise, what's the point? Times of crisis, times of disruption, such as we have experienced with COVID, as hard and as challenging, as difficult as they are, it's actually in these times that God's people, you and I, are often helped to recover our vocation, gain a clear sense of purpose, at the heart of which is love.

So it's worth us always looking to be seeing how we can love others, be in contact with the world around us, with the people God brings us into contact with, and how do we show love?

In one sense, Jesus was very unsuccessful. in his challenge. The different towns throughout, that were around the mountain where Jesus is said to be speaking, you actually, if you read on in the Gospel, you see that they actually resisted Jesus' words.

[10 : 23] Jesus' challenge really fell on deaf ears. It was really the early church who took it up later. But of course, in Jesus, the Jesus whom you are declaring, you turn to, it was Jesus himself who lived out his agenda.

Totally transforming our understanding of God and what it means to be God's people. so he embodied in himself what Jerusalem was meant to be but had failed to be.

Jesus was the salt of the earth. Jesus was the light of the world. He died on a hilltop when all others had rejected him.

he was crucified for all the world to see and in doing so, he became a beacon of hope, life for all, drawing people to worship his father and living out in his own being the way of self-giving love.

As the Archbishop said in his last synod charge, we're on a journey together that is challenging. COVID in many ways has just magnified or accelerated the challenge.

[11 : 51] Keeping to the heart of our faith, keeping our confidence in God's purposes is difficult in an anxious age. Yet in one way, it's very simple, as we heard tonight.

It's looking for ways to be the salt of the earth, the light of the world. Looking for ways to give of yourself in love.

That's another promise you'll be making tonight, to love God and love your neighbour as yourself. As the Archbishop went on to say, in a society like ours that's increasingly proud of its secular identity, there's new narratives of who we are as a nation that are under construction.

Time is going to tell how much they will actually incorporate what we are to keep our focus on. The wisdom of our faith, Israel, the Jewish people and also the Christian communities that emerged from that.

Christianity over the centuries has shared a long journey with many forms of polity and governance. And there's much that we can share in open dialogue with those who are seeking to shape the future directions of our nation.

[13 : 27] The Archbishop spoke of our tradition of lament that we find in the Christian scriptures. We also see much wisdom contained in Jesus' teaching, of course.

In particular, what we're in the middle of at the moment, the Sermon on the Mount. and a lot of that resonates with truth-telling about frontier conflict, a First Nations voice to parliament, treaty, rules-based processes to deal with corruption, and gendered violence.

So I'm speaking about general things in our society. Of course, you can also be thinking of what it means for you to be actually in contact with, in relationship with, people whom God brings you in contact with in your day-to-day life.

See, really, Jesus is saying there's no place for withdrawing from our world. And you coming tonight and being confirmed, and you belonging here in this church, it's not about just being in a ghetto, just being in this huddle.

This community of faith is to actually support you as you go out and be an ambassador for Christ. We're to be different so we can make a difference in our world.

[14 : 51] We are to be salt and light so we can make a difference as we live as followers of Jesus bringing in his kingdom, helping to shape and mould our culture rather than just simply reflect it.

And if you want to know what differentness looks like, what it means to be the salt of the earth, the light of the world, then I would say as a start, go back and read the first 12 verses of Matthew chapter 5, what we know as the Beatitudes, because actually effectively you're told eight times what it looks like to be the salt of the earth, eight times what it means to be a light set on a hill.

when Jesus said, blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, blessed are the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers and those persecuted for righteousness' sake.

it was turning things upside down as to what we think is greatness in the kingdom of heaven, what it means to be blessed and yet that's what Jesus said and he goes straight on and says, you are the salt of the earth and you are the light of the world.

And my prayer tonight for Tim, Charlie and Steph and for the congregation you belong to, is that you won't lose sight of what it means to be the salt of the earth, the light of the world.

[16 : 36] That as you in the power of the spirit follow Jesus, growing in your knowledge and love of him, you'll be making a difference as you're gifted and strengthened by the spirit.

That's something I'll be very specifically praying for you tonight as I lay hands on you, that you'll be strengthened by the spirit and also that you'll be gifted by the spirit.

That you'll be making a difference as you love God and love your neighbour as yourself, as you are a beacon of hope to all around you and all God, all of whom God brings you into contact with throughout your life.

and held love you. Thank you. Thanks. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.