

“Salt and Light”

A sermon by the Rev. Frances Savill

Sunday February 9, 2014

Matthew 5:13-20

“You folks are **the** very salt of the earth...”

“You folks are **the** light of the world....”

These are the words Jesus declares to us. Jesus proclaims in this place and in this day, that this community of believers is the salt of North Bay, part of the salt of the whole earth. Christian communities all across the country flavour and preserve the whole.

Can you imagine the early church, hearing Matthew’s words, a handful of persecuted believers, hearing the honour and power of Jesus’ words for them.

You make a difference in the world. Ask anyone who has had to eliminate salt from their diets – salt makes a difference to how everything tastes.

You together, as the body of Christ, those who are joined to Jesus, who are his disciples, are significant.

The work that Jesus has called you to, who you are in Christ Jesus together, make a difference as much as salt changes the flavour of food, or a light on a stand lights up the whole house.

One of the things most of us, as Christians wonder, is how do we make the most impact for Jesus.

What can the church do that we will have greatest effect on the community around us. Jesus doesn't seem to be too concerned with that question.

He says that you are salt – when you are his disciples, you will change things, you will have an impact on the world around you.

One of the things about Jesus' analogy is that salt needs to be with other foods – salt by itself is not particularly tasty.

Its purpose is to flavour everything else.

A light isn't particularly useful in broad daylight - but even a little light in the dark is greatly appreciated.

Our purpose is to be in the world, to be with other people who do not know Jesus.

Jesus himself is described as the light of the world – and here he describes his disciples this way.

As we reflect the light of Christ, as Jesus is in us, and working through us, so we light the way for others.

So what does it look like to be salt and light?

- it looks like being a person of hope
- a person of compassion
- a person who cares for others who isn't self-absorbed
- it means being part of a community that is accepting, that finds practical ways to help those in need
- it means to act with justice, paying special attention to the vulnerable.

The Christian community, people who are salt and light, get involved in the things of the world – speak for justice – stand with the oppressed- reach out and reach down to give a hand up.

Our passage from Isaiah warns us about being a community that says the right words, but does not follow Jesus' teaching.

“day after day they seek me and delight to know my ways,” says the Lord,

“As if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God.”

“Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house, when you see the naked to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly.”

One year during Holy Week, a few Christians decided to spend a night with homeless friends on the street. They were looking for the suffering Christ in the lives of those who spend their days and nights suffering from hunger, disease and rejection. It was a chilly night, and rain rolled in close to midnight. Looking for shelter, the handful of travelers felt fortunate to come upon a church holding an all-night prayer vigil. The leader of the group was a pastor. As she stepped through the outer doors of the church, a security guard stopped her. She explained that she and the rest of their group were Christians. They had no place to stay and were wet and miserable,

and would like to rest and pray. Enticed by the lighted warmth of the sanctuary, she had forgotten that her wet, matted hair and dishevelled clothing left her looking like just another homeless person from the street. The security guard was friendly, but explained in brutal honesty, “I was hired to keep homeless people like you out.” As the dejected group made their way back into the misery of the night, they knew they had found their suffering Christ, locked out of the church.

Not the church at its best.

The community in the sanctuary were seeking God in prayer, but were closed to the opportunity to serve God and offer hospitality to those in need.

Worship reorders us and orients us to live justly and care for the vulnerable, the oppressed, and those in need.

Another church in the downtown in a community very much like ours, was struggling with their coffee and fellowship time after church. Some of the homeless people from the neighbourhood started to join them.

Some folks were glad for their presence, others were uncomfortable, and others were concerned for the safety of the kids.

They found discarded needles in their washrooms.

What is the church to do?

What does it mean to be the body of Christ that feeds the hungry, and clothes the needy, and serves the least?

These words of Jesus are not easy, and do not make us comfortable.

We are challenged to find solutions and to care enough to be inconvenienced.

Salt and light, that's what we are.

We change the flavour of the world around us, bringing out the God-flavour, and bringing the light of Christ to all the places of darkness in this world as we get involved, as we take risks, as we engage our hearts, listening for God, and give not only an offering but ourselves to Jesus' mission in our midst.

Thanks be to God.