

Salt & Light

St. John's Presbyterian, Mt. Roskill

Sunday 27th May – Communion Sunday

Rev. Dr. Colin S. Marshall

Readings: Psalm 27, 2 Chronicles 13:4-12, Matthew 5:11-20, 1 John 1:5-10

Matthew 5 begins with the Beatitudes, Jesus' description of what makes a blessed, a happy, Christian. These are not depictions of Christian meekness or weakness but rather descriptions of the attitude we develop as a result of knowing that we are walking in God's will, even if the world is walking in another direction. They are a description of the hope and expectation we have God will eventually restore all things to how they should be and we will receive the true benefits of faith. Jesus' depiction of the Christian life continues with the powerful metaphors of salt and light.

We are all familiar with salt. It sits as a condiment on the table; it adds and enhances the flavour of various foods. We add it to our cooking. Some of our meats and preserved fruit, like corn-beef and olives, have a lot of salt in them to protect them against decay and going off. When salts gets into our eyes or in a cut it stings. When we swim in the sea we taste it and feel it on our skin. Washing wounds with a light salt solution is still one of the most effective ways of cleaning them. Salt cleanses. Our bodies are critically attuned to salt. In fact, salt is the basis of the internal battery that runs the electrical system of our body. If we get the sodium-potassium mix wrong in our bodies all sorts of things begin to go quite seriously wrong. Because salt is a key protector of our bodies if our salt balance gets too low we become vulnerable to all sorts of pathogens and diseases.

While we take salt for granted today, because it is so easily accessible, it hasn't always been that way. Salt is so important that in different periods nations have gone to war over salt. In 1540 the Salt War between the Papal States and the region of Perugia was over Perugia's refusal to pay Pope Paul III's increased taxes on salt. A persistent but unproven rumour exists that some Roman soldiers were, at one stage, paid in salt. Ironically, the word "salary" we use today has its origins in the word "salt". All English towns that end in "wich" were named that because it meant they were a place where salt could be traded. Later this "wich" label came to mean a general place of business.

In Leviticus 2:13 the Israelites were told to offer salt with all their offerings; with the meat offerings and with the grain offerings. In Middle Eastern cultures the expression "we have salt between us" means that people are friends and have an enduring relationship. When a serious business contract or a covenant of any form was finalised a sacrificial meal was shared in which salt was a key ingredient symbolising the permanence of the relationship because of salt's preservative aspect. In 2 Chronicles 13:4 we read that **"that the LORD, the God of Israel, has given the kingship of Israel to David and his descendants forever by a covenant of salt?"**

Talking to those who would follow Him Jesus said, **"You are the salt of the earth."** And Mark (9:50) also records Jesus saying, **"Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other."** What He was saying then has become pretty obvious hasn't it? Christians are critical to the life world. We are to add flavour, to bring about

cleansing and purification. We are to be living sacrifices and we are to have enduring relationships with each other and with God. We are so critical that when we do not do what we are supposed to do the whole world order gets out of balance and bad things happen. And if we lose our saltiness, if we fail to do what is required of us then not only we suffer but so does the world. To maintain your saltiness you need to spend plenty of time with other salt. As anyone who has grown salt crystals knows, salt crystals grow and get stronger by adhering to one another. Without other salt around the mineral dissolves into the surround material. Our impact as a Christian is the greatest when we work with other Christians. Together our effectiveness is multiplied many times over.

Ever thought you were that important? Well, in God's plan you are. Only you can do the work that God calls you to. Only you can speak into the situations that God opens up before you. Never under-estimate how powerfully God can use you in the world. Your words can bring healing and peace, forgiveness and love, restoration, encouragement and hope. Your love and perseverance can warm the coldest heart and your witness permeates through clubs, businesses and communities. Your example of righteousness and honesty stands as a witness to the Lord against the corrupt practices of the world and the carelessness of the selfish. And your relationships between each other across generational, cultural and all other divisions stand as a witness to an increasingly divided world. We are called to be salt in the world.

From this, the second image of light follows naturally. Light exposes the things of darkness and shows them for what they truly are. The words of 1 John 1 come to mind here: **“God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.”** Simply put, our lives betray our real situation. If we walk in integrity and confess our failings to God He will cleanse us and keep us on the right track. The light of God exposes all sin but when we confess our sin before Him and we change our behaviours, which is the outward sign of repentance, then forgiveness flows and the darkness is repelled. When words and behaviour don't match darkness grows and forgiveness is not received.

Light gives clarity to what we are doing. Imagine yourself walking through a busy shop. It's easy to do with the lights on but imagine doing it in complete darkness. You'd stumble over everything and you'd be crashing into people all the time. Metaphorically, this is what life is like without God. But when we are the light we bring clarity and order to the situation. And this torch we carry is that of Jesus and His Way. Jesus is the light of the world and we are His torch bearers. We carry Him inside us and the brighter He is in our lives the brighter we shine. John the Baptist had it completely right when he said, “He must increase, I must decrease.” As we

increasingly submit our lives to Jesus. As we grow in the personal disciplines of faith, as we look for what God wants us to do and respond to those situations His light grows in us. As we make choices that honour God and reject evil the light grows in us. As we live sacrificially, as we make the effort to serve God and other people at cost to ourselves the light grows in us. As we reject the behaviours in our lives that do not honour God or bring glory to His name, whether other people see or not, the light grows in us. As we pray, as we are faithful in our worship together, as we read Scripture daily, His light grows in us.

Have you ever seen glow-worms? They are the most incredible little things. A single one stands out in the darkness. A tiny prickle of light. Many, many glow-worms together are stunningly beautiful. This is what we are, not worms, but together a bright shining light pointing to Jesus, worshipping and serving the Father by the Spirit. This is the church, a light to be set on a hill for all the world to see. Sort of like we are. We are the salt and light for the world as we serve God, as we become more and more like Jesus and as we shine for Him doing the works the Spirit prompts us to do. You are important. Don't underestimate this or allow the devil to speak lies into your life about your unworthiness. Jesus is more than faithful to His task of bringing forgiveness and new light and purpose into your life as you open up the door to your heart and allow Him in. He has a wonderful future in store for you. You can't begin to imagine what God can do with a willing heart. You are precious and loved in God's eyes and He wants you to partner with Him and His church in being salt and light in a needy world.

“In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matt 5:16)

Amen