

The Kingdom's Salt and Light (Salt shaker and torch)

Over these Sunday mornings Matthew has us hunkered down sitting listening to Jesus just like those first followers. Jesus the light of the world has come, we have been drawn to his light, we have heard his call to come and follow him and now he is up on the mountainside vs 1 and guess what? We have front row seats. We can hear him loud and clear. He is teaching us what it means to follow him, what it means to be part of the Kingdom of God – its ethic and its practice. He is teasing out the details and helping us to understand the norms of kingdom living, of Christian living.

What is he saying to us

Vs 13 “You (plural –yous) are the salt of the earth”

Now our modern minds hear this phrase and we maybe think of the expression used to describe someone who would do anything for anyone, a general all round good guy. Also we have a bit of a thing about salt because it is linked with high blood pressure. I think we need to put both of them aside because in Jesus time salt was seen as a good thing. The Roman philosopher Pliny who lived around the same time said that nothing was more useful in life than salt and sunshine (salt and light!?). So when Jesus says you are to be the salt of the earth he is saying you are to be a good thing.

Okay so we are to be an everyday substance that is good for life and living that at the time was generally acknowledged as a good thing. Great. What does that mean exactly? In Jesus day salt was used e.g. at the birth of a child, the newborn would be rubbed down to prevent infection. But it had two main uses. It was a meat preserver (no deep freezes in those days) and it was a seasoning.

As a child we had a family row boat which we used for fishing – prawns, mackerel, salmon, trout, cod and so on. Around this time of year the herring came inshore and we would put out the herring net. My Dad had a real fondness of herring. It had to be salted, of course, so rather than put the fish in the freezer he bought preserving salt from the local supplier and would layer the fish and the salt in buckets. My mother made him keep them in the shed because they stank. But of course the herring could be kept over the winter and eaten along with the tatties he had grown in the garden.

It preserved the fish and added to their flavour!
Hence, no salt and the meat would lack some flavour and also soon decay.

So Jesus is saying if you follow him and the way of the kingdom you will be seasoning (adding a distinctive flavour) to the world we live in and prevent decay. From a wider reading of the gospel I think the

decay Jesus speaks about is a spiritual and moral one.

Spiritual because Jesus came into the world to seek those lost to God. To call them back to the Father who loves them. And by leading people back to him they too become salt but also morally, spiritually, relationally and so on transformed because the work of God in our lives – as individuals, as family, as community citizens and so on. Making us more like Jesus. Especially in a democracy we have a right to share our increasingly minority moral view which ultimately will preserve us from the moral decay we are experiencing. Amongst some folks today wrong is right and right is wrong. Sin is fun and spice and not sinning is boring. That is recipe for disaster.

The Government want local communities to work together to help the nation and to solve the issues within their communities. Churches are ideally placed for that. We can be salt in our community. Bringing a distinctive flavour. We are doing that already of course by sharing the good news but also in other ways – tuesday club getting over 55's from the community together, football with the teenagers from the community – finding focus for their energy and studying the bible to help them understand who God is and the life he wants them to enjoy, community garden – beautify area but also a meeting place. Other issues in the community loneliness, racism, family issues, drugs, teenage drinking and

promiscuity, violence and so on. We can bring salt and seasoning to these areas also. Do you believe that? Alternatively we can do nothing and keep the salt in the salt shaker. Do we want to do that? Of course not. We want the salt that Jesus calls us to be.

People will not always like our morality. We are salt not honey. Salt has a bite. The bite might be the gospel which in the end tells people they are sinners and need God's forgiveness. People don't like being told they are wrong. I think we are quite a self righteous culture. We do not consider ourselves that bad. We live decent middle class lives. Then why if we are so moral as a nation why are 18 000 children dying every day from preventable diseases? If we are such a moral nation why are so many of our teenagers out roaming the streets at night creating harm? Well that's nothing to do with me? Isn't it? It is to do with us all. If we are such a moral nation why are we known as the morally dirty man of Europe by our European neighbours? Ludicrous abortion rules, bizarre legislation on human sexuality, very dodgy embryo experimentation agreements. We voted the governments in who have allowed all these things. This world needs salt. It's not just me that is saying it. Jesus is saying it. The social commentators are saying it. Government are saying it. The nation is discussing it.

Do you agree? How do you feel about it? Jesus is telling you, he is telling us we are to be salt. And the implication he is telling us that it is impossible to follow the norms of the kingdom in a purely private way. Salt needs proximity to share its seasoning and preserving properties. We cannot keep out salt in a saltshaker. It must be spread around to have effect. We can do that as individuals, as families and as a church. We have something good – it is selfish to keep it to ourselves.

Now I know that a lot of you do a great deal in the community for neighbours or in the workplace for work colleagues. But you maybe don't associate that with your faith. The thing to learn from this then is that you are to be salt for the kingdom. So when folks ask you why you do it you say, it's the way that God has made us – to help each other.

I read an interesting article from the business guru – Ken Blanchard. The church in general needs to hear this and we can learn from it too. If you want to run a successful long term business the answer is simple, "Take your focus off yourselves and refocus on the only reason for your existing – to serve your customers"

You know how it is, you are waiting in long queue in a bank. There is only one person on the counter whilst 6-7 others seem to be busy in the background. What are they doing? Sorting out internal disputes,

implementing policy changes, dealing with staff related strife and so on. That is partly why we have agreed on the Kirk Session and Congregational board to radically cut the number of times we meet, so we have more time to be out there as salt and light.

Okay. We are up for it. How do we do it?

In telling us we are salt the priority for Jesus, as we saw a couple of weeks ago, is people and not possessions and material things.

People matter to God. They should matter to us. Most, though not all, of Jesus work happened in an interruption. Somebody pulling him aside. And there are parties in heaven, when? When over one sinner repents. When one person returns to God. When the lost are found.

I think we can end up groaning inwardly because Jesus sets the bar high doesn't he? Learning to be salt is a lifelong process. Hopefully over time we can learn to be more potent. Our potency is what Jesus then goes on to mention.

Matthew 5:13 ¹³ "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men."

Proximity and potency are required. Salt only loses its potency when it has impurities added. We remain potent when we remain close to Jesus and are refreshed in him. Time with his word. Time in fellowship. Time in prayer. That is why we are trying to set up the church programme in such a way that activities for prayer, bible study and so on are as much as possible held on a Tuesday night. Now obviously some people can't manage on a Tuesday night and so there are options but for future reference prayer and bible study activities should in the main happen on a Tuesday night. We are also trying to cut back on admin meetings to allow folks to have time to be refreshed in the Lord and maintain their potency.

In what ways does this idea of being salt affect your life – at work with your colleagues, at home with family and friends, down at the gym or bowling club, with your classmates, in halls. Conversations, way respond to things? Be salt – seasoned with Christ and his life giving goodness. Get out there says Jesus and do some good for the kingdom – get the good news of out in word and in action. (NB note about HG and learning to share the faith)

Walk across the room illustration by Bill Hybels.

Jesus also says, **Matthew 5:14-16** ¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ In

the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Light

The imagery of light is used variously in the bible – in connection with joy, blessing and life. It signifies God's presence, God's holiness, the revelation of the love of God in penetrating lives darkened by sin. Jesus at another point says he is the light of the world. So in a sense since he has risen we are now the light. Our light is like the moon's, it reflects the light of the sun. So too we reflect the light of Christ.

Jesus is inferring that if there is light then there is darkness. We must not be afraid to let the light of Christ shine in and through us. Sometimes we do fear what people will say if they hear we have started going to church or go to a housegroup bible study and so on.

Jesus says, vs 14 'A city on a hill cannot be hidden' in other words you will not be able to hide it.' Vs 15 'Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl' Don't try to hide it. 'Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.' It is a good thing, let folks benefit from it. Vs 16 'In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see you good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.'

Notice what Jesus is saying here, there is no personal confrontation nor ministerial pronouncements. But what there is is the fruit of a Christ-like life.

As someone once said, 'Lighthouses blow no horns, they just shine'. Something about our lives will have folks saying not you are great but your God is great.

People are watching. Things that sparkle draw the eye. I helped out at an event for a few days a while back and people kept saying you are this or you are that. They were watching me. They are watching you. Things that sparkle draw the eye. Sparkle for Christ and the kingdom. Shine like he shone.

Cameron's favourite night time songs for 3 years was

'Twinkle, twinkle little star
How I wonder what you are?'

As you grow in the faith people will notice the changes.

The way we conduct our lives matters. That we do not waste our employers or lecturers time by being lazy. We are the ones who are first to help a colleague. We are the last to return a barbed comment. Honest, genuine.

Good deeds may involve us just telling our life's story and where God genuinely fits into that.

In bygone days when the word of God was powerfully proclaimed and lives were being transformed by it, people were becoming Christians, what was also generated was huge social reform – prison reform, medical provision, education for all, trade unions, limitation on alcohol, abolition of slavery and child labour, orphanages. The light shone in their hearts and in their lives and actions.

Encourage you to get involved in the community – e.g. the community council is screaming out for folks to get involved and get things done for the area. That is an area we can shine in. As you shine you will meet many different folks some of whom will be searching for something more.

People are searching.

Recently I have met folks who don't go to church but are reading the bible. Searching. I met a guy who said, I have tried to find him but he doesn't seem there for me'. Searching. There is misunderstanding – someone once told me that they believed if you were cremated you went to hell and if you were buried you went to heaven. Searched and set upon a poor substitute. What nonsense! God's good news is a million times better than that.

We can hear Jesus teaching today and go away and forget it. Be completely unmoved. But Jesus could have remained in heaven, unmoved by our plight and not got his hands dirty in order to rescue, redeem and free us. But he came and got his hands dirty. Communion today is a reminder of that. He came his body broken, his blood shed- why? For love sake. To bring we who were lost souls back to God. For loves sake has says be kingdom salt, be kingdom light.