

SPRINKLE THE SALT AND SHINE THE LIGHT

Is 58:1-8; Mt 5:13-20

‘Jesus bids us shine with a pure clear light, like a little candle burning in the night; in this world of darkness we must shine, you in your small corner and I in mine.’ We are called to shine and to be salt in the world. How are we doing?

It’s important to notice that Jesus doesn’t say, ‘You *should* be the salt of the earth or you *could* be the light of the world.’ ‘You **ARE** the salt; you **ARE** the light.’ You are salt; you are light – because you have Jesus within you. Remember Jesus said, ‘*I* am the light of the world.’ And then here He says, ‘*You* are the light of the world.’ We have His light within us. He is the true light and so when we are hooked up with Jesus we have His light to shine through us. So Jesus wasn’t just speaking to the spiritual heavyweights, the religious leaders; He was speaking to the common people – people like you and me.

These two images of salt and light speak particularly about our witness and service in the world. You are light for *the world*; you are salt for *the earth*. Salt in the salt cellar is no good; neither is a candle that is unlit. Sometimes our churches are like big salt cellars – the salt stays inside; it doesn’t get sprinkled around as it should. Or we are like a light which is hidden by the four walls and roof of our buildings – it doesn’t shine beyond the walls. The Church is here for the sake of the world. If we are not involved in the world we are missing our calling.

We easily complain about the state of the world around us. But we also need to look at ourselves. If the world is not what it should be, at least part of the problem is because we, as the Church, are not fulfilling our role as salt and light.

In the time of Jesus the main purpose of salt was to preserve food. In that hot climate, with nothing like fridges around, food would very quickly go off unless it was heavily salted. It’s like that South African delicacy – biltong. Its raw meat that is heavily salted and spiced and then left to cure. It’s the salt that keeps it from going off. In a similar way we have the responsibility of keeping society from going off. We live in a world of crime and corruption; of violence; of abuse of women and children; a world of division and discrimination; of environmental destruction. Without the salt of Christ’s followers, those things can only become worse. The salt of our lives can make a difference?

And then the light. Whereas the purpose of salt is to counteract the negative, the purpose of light is to promote the positive; to promote truth, beauty, goodness. Jesus says, ‘Let your light so shine that people may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.’ We are light when we say and do things that people can see, and which make them give thanks to God.

When we share our faith; when we clothe the naked; when we visit the prisoner and the lonely; when we comfort the bereaved; when we feed the bodies and the minds and the spirits of people; when we do such things we are shining the light of Jesus. Isaiah says, ‘If you share your bread and care for the homeless; if you cover the naked and deepen your family bonds, then your light shall break forth like the dawn and your healing shall spring up quickly.’

Talking of healing - healing has two aspects. One aspect is to fight the bad things – the bacteria and the viruses; the other is to build up the good, by eating properly; getting sleep, exercise etc. Fighting the bad, promoting the good. It’s like the salt and the light. We are here to bring healing to our world – one side of that is about stopping the rot – being the salt; the other side is about promoting the good – being the light.

But to be effective, the salt of our lives must remain salty and the light must remain bright. The salt must be salty enough to stop the rot; the light must be bright enough to disperse the darkness. We cannot be salt and light for the world if we are just like the world. We need to be distinct from the world around us.

If we are as rotten as the world around us and if our light is hardly brighter than the darkness around us, we will be useless. But when the church stands out clearly from the world, people sit up and notice. The world may not always like what it sees but it cannot ignore the church.

So how can we retain our 'saltiness' and our brightness? Most of all we need to stay close to the one who is the true salt and the true light – Jesus Christ. As we live close to Him and allow His Spirit to live in and through us, the healing life and light of Jesus becomes active in the world. Jesus, using image of the vine and the branches, says, 'If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit.' Its about staying in close communion with Jesus. In the words of the old song, 'Just a closer walk with Thee, grant it Jesus this my plea; daily walking close to Thee, let it be dear Lord, let it be.'

But there is something else I want to add. I think we retain our effectiveness as salt and light when we find the area that is closest to our heart; an issue in the world that we are most passionate about. We cannot do everything needed for all the problems of the world; but we can do something about one or two of them. Try to identify the area that you feel most strongly about. Maybe it is unemployment; maybe it is child abuse; maybe it is the environment; maybe it is evangelism; maybe it is teaching people the Bible, maybe it is care for the elderly.

You will be most effective as salt and light if you focus on the area that burns most strongly in your heart; the thing that moves or keeps you awake at night. Amen