**SERMON Ord 5A – All Souls 9 February 2020**

**Isaiah 58.1-9a 1 Cor 2:1-12 Matt 5 :13-20**

**Gospel Theme: Salt and Light**

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*You are the salt of the earth*

*You are the light of the world*

You **are** the Salt, you **are** the Light!

It doesn’t say you **could be** the Salt or the Light.

It doesn’t say you **should be** the Salt and the Light.

It says you **are**. It is a promise!

Our reading from Matthew is near the beginning of Jesus' well-known “Sermon on the Mount."

In this text, Jesus called his followers then, as well as today, to the highest standards of behaviour. He challenges us to "turn the other cheek," to love our enemy, to forgive those who do us wrong, and to act with the purest motives. He said there are two roads, a wide road that leads to destruction and a narrow road that leads to life

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And here in today's text he calls those who follow him to choose to be a godly influence on the world in which they live. Those are tough commands. Jesus clearly expects each of us to make a difference, to be an ambassador of the Kingdom.

The image of salt was commonplace in Jesus’ day. It was used as a spice and a preservative and was present in every household. Fish from the Sea of Galilee was preserved in salt. The Greeks called salt “divine”. The Romans said: “There is nothing more useful than sun and salt.” In the time of Jesus, salt was given three special qualities: purity, preservation from corruption, and giving flavour to life.

Salt is also identified with Wisdom. Paul writes to the Colossians: 4.5-6 “Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.“

Jesus goes on: "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot."

Sodium Chloride, table salt like Pam’s here, or Cerebos, that you purchase at a supermarket, is pure (this one does have anti-caking agent but I’m sure it’s pure enough). But our Iodised table Salt did not exist back in the first century.

When ancient people mined salt from a quarry or from salt pans at the Dead Sea, it was never completely pure. Occasionally the salt they gathered was so impure that it did not taste salty at all.

When that happened they would cast it out the door to harden the pathway that led to their home. Jesus says "It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot".

So as followers of Christ, to make a difference the world, we have to be usable salt. We are called to be pure, authentic. When Jesus says:"You are the salt of the earth." He is stating a fact. By being his disciple - you are the salt of the earth.

It is not an option. The only choice is what kind of salt we will be.

*You are the light of the world.*

The image of light is a universal one. Jesus is likened to a light shining in the darkness. Jesus now uses this same image for his disciples. He was demanding nothing less than they should be like himself. Jesus was using an expression quite familiar to the Jews, who often spoke of Jerusalem as “a light to the Gentiles”; the city on the mountain top that cannot be hidden. A revered Rabbi would often be referred to a “Lamp of Israel.”

How did people live in ancient times, once the sun had gone down, and they were inside their homes, public buildings or places of recreation? Dazzled as we are nowadays by light pollution, and having to go to remote places to find a “dark sky”, how do we imagine people living without the aid of electric light, multi-coloured spotlights, centre lights, or neon or halogen lights, lit only by little flames similar to our candles, or at best by torches?

The houses in Palestine were very dark, with only one small circular window about eighteen inches across. The lamp was like a sauce-bowl filled with oil with the wick floating in it. The lamp stood on a lamp stand, which would be no more than a roughly shaped branch of wood. When people left the house, for safety’s sake, they would take the lamp from its stand and put it under an earthen bushel measure, so that it would burn without risk until they returned.

Lastly Jesus speaks about the scribes and the Pharisees, who were not authentic “lamps of Israel,” who were content to obey the laws outwardly, without humbly looking to God to change their hearts.

We are called to be authentic in our walk. To let the salt purify, preserve and give flavour, to speak wisdom in our lives, to let our light shine. Not trying to appear to be perfect. People know when we are wearing a mask.

In Ancient Greece they held great theatrical events and plays in large amphitheaters. They did not have microphones to make their voices heard, nor cameras to magnify their images, so they used large masks, which made them look like the characters they portrayed.

Built into the masks were megaphones to amplify their voices. The actors on stage, got behind their masks and they became somebody else, someone different from whom they really were. The Greeks called these types of actors "The Hypocrites." - the hypocrites that Jesus so roundly condemns.

So how do we “be” the light, the light that shines in the darkness, the light that shines, not for our own glory, but reflecting the light back to its true source.

The readings this week speak of the need for those who believe in God to show that this makes a difference to the way they treat others. It is not enough to believe; we are asked to give evidence of our faith by showing others what God is like through the way we live.

We are called to serve the hungry, the homeless, and the destitute; to act in ways that prevent oppression, anger and harsh words; to speak, not out of our own goodness but in the power that comes from the Holy Spirit; to become like lights shining in the darkness, so that our good works encourage others in their journey towards the praise of God in their own lives. If we live in these ways, the Lord promises us lives of integrity, free from fear and full of trust in God. We will find joy in living in the presence of the Lord.

God wants to change us, but not superficially. God calls us to be transformed, conformed to the image of His Son.

In a world that is always asking us to become something,  
someone, some success story,

In this place we say: don’t become, be who we already are.

Don’t become light – be the light you already are –  
this is what God anciently placed in you.

Don’t become salt –be the salt you already are –

it is in this way you are known to God.

For from these elements: Salt and Light, God uniquely crafted you.

Don’t become anything –be who you are,  
and discover the one who loves you in your be-ing.

You are the salt of the earth

You are the light of the world.

It is a promise.

Amen