

Sermon 9th February 2014 Isaiah 58:1-12 Mt 5:13-20 "Light, salt and faith expression"

Prayer: Gracious God, grant us eyes to see your vision for your people. Help us rise as a light, as we delight in your commands. Be with us as we live being the Gospel of Jesus in the world. Amen.

Our teaching this morning is again a challenge for us to examine fundamental building blocks of our faith-life attitude. Isaiah gives a picture of God challenging his people a long time ago. And Matthew gives us Jesus teaching continuing on from last week's 'Be-attitudes-for-life' teaching. The focus for worship is based on Jesus' comparison of the necessity of salt / light for life and the necessity of God/Christ-neighbour-self interaction for life.

I am going to ask you to participate in a quiz this morning! It was given in the background material so I have the questions on the screen and we will take a few moments on each one. Please do turn to your neighbour and see if you can come up with the correct answer!

Salt Quiz:

1. The adult body has about how many grams of salt? a.50 b.**250** c.500 d.1000
2. Which of the following words comes from salt? a. Salute b.**Salad** c. **Salary** d. Salvation
3. **True** or false: Salt in the ancient world was so important that it was a part of war strategy?
4. **True** or false: Table salt can help you fight diseases?
5. What is the chemical formula for salt? (**NaCl**)
6. Humans cannot live without salt because: a. Salt exfoliates the skin b. Salt aids in digestion c. **Salt regulates water in the body** d. Salt helps oxygenate blood
7. Although salt is produced and mined on every continent, what are the top five salt producing countries? (HINT: Australia, Canada, China, Egypt, Germany, India, Iran, Mexico, Russia and USA are all in the top 20.)
8. The American Heart Association recommends eating what amount of sodium for a healthy diet? a. Less than 10,000 mg b. Less than 7,000 mg c. **Less than 1,500 mg** d. Less than 250 mg

Answers:

- 1 B: The adult human body has about 250g of salt, about ½ pound.
- 2 B & C: Salad comes from *Salare* 'to salt.' Salary comes from *salarius* which means 'pertaining to salt' originally a "soldier's allowance for the purchase of salt.
- 3 True: British troops stole George Washington's salt supply during the Revolutionary War, depriving soldiers of a necessary mineral. In 1812 Napoleon's salt supply ran out and many of his soldiers perished from the lack of salt in their diets when retreating from the Russian front. Caesar was very protective of the salt supply since salt was more precious than gold. Roman soldiers were paid in salt.
- 4 True: Although over consumption of salt can lead to high blood pressure, table salt can help fight disease. In 1924, Iodine was added to table salt to help fight diseases caused by iodine deficiencies.
- 5 NaCl – Sodium Chloride
- 6 C: Salt aids in osmosis which regulates water in the body.
- 7 China, USA, Germany, India & Australia are the top 5 producers in the world.
- 8 C: less than 1,500 mg (1.5g)

Salt is necessary for life – just as **light is**. Jesus used both as examples as he taught about how we – his followers are to 'be' in life. Our passage from Matthew is very rich, and we will not be doing it justice today as we *skim the surface* focusing on continuing the theme of life-faith attitudes coming from within a person enabling that person to 'shine'. cV

The renowned expert on the subject of death and dying, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, 20th-century: said "People are like stained-glass windows. They sparkle and shine when the sun is out, but when the darkness sets in, their **true beauty** is revealed only if there is a light from within." Cv

It is this light from within that Jesus was trying to teach about. **This** light without faith, *a living, breathing, active* faith **cannot** be sustained his 'right' way without the living presence of the Divine. The darkness, E K-Ross speaks of **does** 'set-in' and like the psalmist of old we find ourselves walking

though the *valley of shadows*. **Sometimes** the shadow is death – *but sometimes* it is a word given or received from anger; *sometimes* it is caused by an action; *sometimes* by circumstances beyond our control... **but always** while we have breath, the darkness *will set-in*.

When it does – what happens to you? Does **your** light still shine? *Or has* the window of your soul got a little ‘shade covering’ of its own? Its’ not that we are condemned for this, Jesus recognises it completely and challenges us to personal audits; soul and heart and mind audits to let the light shine. There is no condemnation and should we walk away and reject this teaching that is *another* sermon completely. Should we stay **then** the challenges come thick and fast.

One exploration of challenge today is from Isaiah and his people and it is on the subject of fasting. Fasting as an expression of devotion, religious obedience, of sacrifice, of living what the people understood as being the ‘right’ way that God asked. Yes, God did / does want sacrifice, fasting, people to worship and praise... and belong... but not in isolation, nor to serve and promote self-interest, nor is it’s observance an excuse to break the law, Gods commands when it suits.

Isaiah-God / Matthew- Jesus teach our faith expression comes from within, it is not an external item that we pick up – discard at will / depending on circumstance / challenge before us... That kind of faith a) is not authentic b) is too easy! Jesus said he did not come to break the law, but to fulfil it, within his own flesh. And when he was asked for the heart of the law, the core to build faith on he said the greatest commandment was to love. Love God, neighbour and self **with everything you’ve got**.

*It is not love of **God or neighbour** that allows the ‘self’ to pretend and worship on a Sunday and refuse to find a way to be involved to: lose the chains of injustice; untie the cords of the yoke; set the oppressed free; break every yoke; share food with the hungry; provide the poor wanderer with shelter; clothe those without and turn to our own flesh and blood when in need....*

And actually what our faith teaches and we know deep down, is that this is not love of self either. To “love” is to want, desire, and actively work for the best – for the object, focus, being of our love, whether it is our self, our neighbour or our Lord. The purest expression of love is Jesus, we follow to do our best, but all too often that ‘darkness’ obscures our way and ‘love’ starts to distort – our self dominates as in the Isaiah passage this morning; **or** our neighbour dominates and any faith motivation / expression is lost **or** our worship dominates as expressed in Isaiah...

It is hard to follow Jesus, hard to fulfil the requirements of the law, hard to keep the light burning brightly 24/7 and retain our ability to add ‘a Jesus salt-flavouring’ to any mix we are in **but** when we **do**, we have this promise (vs8): “Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. **9** Then you will call, and the LORD will answer.... **11** he will satisfy your needs....”

We do not do it in our own strength or power but in the power of Jesus in us, with the light of Jesus in us that shines out of us for everyone to see. This is when the heart of the law is being served and righteousness, the right way is being followed, we are being salt and light in the world. This means we are bringing goodness and life to others drawing them into the circle of love and healing, restoration and salvation, offering a knowledge of a power greater than our own and it’s ever-lasting.

~~JvdLaar~~ – “Salt and light people are those who bring flavour and colour, integrity and insight, healing and compassion into the world by the way they live, love and interact. Their influence is felt not through judgement or legalism, but through a life lived with a completely different quality, that touches others with grace and truth and compassion and calls out to the best in them, leaving them longing to live better lives themselves. This is what it means to let our good deeds be seen so that others will praise God, and it’s the only thing that really brings change into the world. As Gandhi famously said: “Be the change you wish to see in the world”. * ~~JvdLaar~~ Amen