

## Sermon for 5.2.17

The gospel passage today from Matthew, is part of the Sermon on the Mount.

It follows directly on from the beatitudes which, as we heard last week, are a literary form that describe a person whose way of life reflects God's way in the world.

The Beatitudes proclaim a deep wisdom about life in God and with each other, and speak of an inner attitude of receptivity and openness to God.

In today's passage we move into the teaching statements that underlie the way of the beatitudes, and in the passage there are two main points.

The first comes in the form of a metaphor about Salt and light. The second is about the way of righteousness in the kingdom compared to that of the scribes and Pharisees.

Jesus say to his followers, "You are the salt of the world. But if salt has lost its taste it is no longer good for anything.

You are the light of the world a city built on a hill cannot be hid."

As we know, salt is both a taste enhancer and a preservative and at the time of the gospel salt also served as a currency.

Soldiers in the Roman army were paid a "salt allowance". From this comes the saying. "Worth his salt". Salt was in fact at this time an essential – a necessity for everyday life.

And even today, I'm sure we can all recall personal experience in our daily eating habits, about the necessity of salt in our diet.

Perhaps our experience may be more about using too much of it, or not enough - or just enough in our meals.

The other night while at dinner in a favourite restaurant, and while I was using the salt shaker, the lid fell on my plate followed by its entire contents. I looked down at my totally ruined roast duck, felt sorry for myself for a moment, and then opted for a cup of tea instead.

Jesus metaphor in the gospel passage however is about the taste of salt as an enhancer – how it allows flavoursome qualities to emerge and also sustain a freshness.

The metaphor about light refers also to its true purpose. About lighting up the surrounds and being seen by all rather than hidden under a bushel where its purpose is lost.

And as with salt, the light of the lantern also was a necessity in everyday life in the gospel times.

Concerning the Old Testament books, the Law and the Prophets, Jesus validates them completely as God's revelation which will never fail in the least degree.

But he is against the legalism contained in the numerous oral laws which the scribes and the Pharisees had decreed and which in effect created a legislative nightmare superstructure, through a system of thousands of rules and regulations which were repressive and in reality unattainable.

Throughout the gospels Jesus continually questioned the honesty and purpose of such legalisms.

For Jesus, false piety was not the way of righteousness for it did not enhance existing qualities in people nor did it light any path of guidance.

The point in today's gospel in the analogy of salt and light – speaks to us about our faith - it should never lose its edge, but remain the enhancer that brings out qualities in ourselves and others. And it should always be a guiding light, not hidden away from sight.

The second is about true righteousness in the kingdom which reaches beyond the individualistic legalisms of any age and instead speaks about a faith filled humility that constantly seeks to be immersed – involved in the life of Christ's body through contemplative reflection on the Word and prayerful mission, while not looking for an individual egotistic heroism or holiness.

To live in this emersion is to live in the fullness of faith in the divine indwelling within us in the Holy Spirit of God. (Paul in the epistle)

It is to have a consciousness that God is not only with us, but within us, constantly offering us all we need by grace.

This is not some sort of refusal of activity in the world, it is rather the only way we can ever act in the world so as to change it effectively because we open the way of Gods' own activity through us.

There is no forcing of others to accept our way, it is simply about living out the blessed life in a faith that has not lost its edge, nor has been hidden away– but rather remains dependent upon God while witnessing to the righteousness of Christ in our daily life.

To live in such a way is to follow the way of Christ and give glory to the heavenly father.

Invite others to pray the collect.

The Lord be with you

