

## *SERMON ~ BIBLE READING: MATTHEW 5:14-16*

When you get back home, get your Bibles out and read the Good News about Jesus as written down by Matthew, chapter 5 and verses 1 to 12 – the verses immediately before today’s Bible reading – words Jesus spoke to his first disciples then and today speaks to us, his disciples in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These verses are all about our special position before God. For these verses tell us that we are the recipients of God’s blessing. But in verses 13-16, today’s Bible reading, Jesus goes on to spell out our responsibility as disciples – our responsibility to give rather than receive. Having received the light of God’s blessing, we must now be prepared to give light to the world.

Jesus also calls us disciples to be ‘salt’. Whilst we think of salt primarily as a seasoning, in Jesus’ day its main function was as a preservative.

Being salt and light in the world ought not to be thought of in terms of measuring spoons and dimmer switches, with small amounts being regulated according to taste or fashion. The role of the Christian in society is vital – not merely flavour-enhancing!

What does that mean for us? At times our lives seem taken up with the mundane, the everyday business of life. But how are we to act as a preservative and a life-giving light in our world or to our colleagues, neighbours, family and friends?

Firstly, we need to discern and identify what is good and essential to God’s abundant life, the life Jesus came to bring. Caring for God’s creation – which means looking after the environment and you’ll be delighted to know that we have signed up to being an eco-congregation and we’ll be keeping you posted on what we can do as a congregation to care for God’s creation. Caring for the uncared-for – thanks to those who have already volunteered to help with catering for the Bethany Night Shelters for homeless people. Caring about justice – thanks to those who are still working to make poverty history and supporting fair-trade goods. Showing compassion and mercy – thanks to all who are a part of our pastoral care team and to all who support organisations which help the poor. Living and speaking the gospel into people’s broken lives – thanks to all who help with the prayer drop which is all about asking God into peoples’ everyday lives and circumstances. To suggest but a few.

Secondly, having identified God's good intentions for our world, we must ask ourselves what part we can play in being salt and light. What small steps can we take to be a part of this process? Talk to our neighbours Listen to our colleagues – and remember that listening is not just waiting for our turn to speak Recycle our rubbish – our church now has recycling bins – 2 blue ones for the plastic bottles, paper and card, a red one for cans and bottles and a brown bin for our church garden stuff – and use your own. Join or investigate a particular campaign – a current campaign calls on our government to stay the course in withholding funding to the IMF and World Bank until they stop pressing poor countries to adopt damaging economic policies – more information from Christian Aid or myself in the first instance, and then write to our MP about it. Pray – talk to God about these issues on your own and with others. Bake a cake for someone going through a hard time. Again to suggest but a few.

Finally, we need to look at our own lives and revisit how God's goodness has been ministered to us over the years. How has he preserved us? In what ways has God been a life-giving light to us? We need to draw upon our own experiences to guide us in how we, too, may pass on God's essential goodness in a rotting world.

### ***FOOD FOR THOUGHT***

1. Talking about salt and light, RT France says that '...each is essential but has its necessary effect on its environment only if it is both distinctive from it and yet fully involved in it. So disciples must function in society as an alternative and challenging community. It is by their visible goodness that they will bring glory to the God who has made them.' (New Bible Commentary, IVP)
2. 'We don't fight against mediocre taste, we fight against the corruption and the rot.' (Conrad Gempf)
3. 'The difference Christians are meant to make is not that between chocolate and chocolatey-chocolate. The difference we're to make is between nourishing protein and putrid, rotten flesh.' (Conrad Gempf)

### ***GOING DEEPER***

Questions on the Bible passage and sermon for you to think about during the week, either on your own or in a small group:

1. The sermon and the service this time have helped us to think in broad terms about being 'salt' and 'light'. How do you see yourself living out the call to be 'salt' and 'light' in your daily life?
2. When we feel weak and impotent, being a bearer of God's light and life-preserving salt can feel an overwhelming and unrealistic challenge. How can we work together to be God's force for good in the world?
3. Can you think of any examples of God's 'salt' and 'light' being channelled through his people to change the world, today?