

Sermon 9th Feb 2020

Matthew 5.13-20

"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. "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Perhaps you have heard these words of Jesus before, 'You are the salt of the earth; you are the light of the world'. I wonder what these sayings mean to you? I wonder if salt or light are things that you think about very much?

I appreciate light more than salt. I am aware of how good it is to have lights in the house when it gets dark outside, and I love the different types of sunlight you get throughout a day, or during different seasons or weather. One of my favourite things is when you can see a shaft of sunlight streaming through a break in the clouds, and it looks like you're getting a glimpse into heaven. Perhaps because it is so visible, light is easy to be thankful for. But salt is also really important. And

even though we only need small amounts of it, not only does salt make food taste good, but without it we would even die. Salt and light both surround us, are part of us, and literally keep us alive. And they are also both things that spread - light fills a whole room, and salt flavours a whole meal. But with all this in mind, I wonder what you think Jesus might have meant by saying that WE are salt and light?

One suggestion, if we think about the fact that salt and light both spread out - is that maybe Jesus meant that our faith is not really for ourselves.

Of course, in some ways faith is for us individually.

Faith is something personal, and it forms our relationship with God which is precious and important, but what I mean is that the purpose of faith, in the bigger picture of the world, is to make a difference to *someone else's* life. The purpose of our being Christians is to help change the lives of the people around us. We aren't supposed to keep our faith all private and safe, being shy of people finding out what we believe - we are supposed to spread it around and be delighted about it! Because in that way, we can change the world one small step at a time.

I came across a quote this week which helps to explain it - the quote is 'We are incomplete when others suffer'. This is why we are to be salt and light. We are deeply

connected to other people. We can't help it, and we can't escape it - we are shaped and formed through our interactions with those around us. And they are affected by interacting with us. So being salt and light - giving life - perhaps just in one small way for one person at a time, is the best thing that we can do. And if we can help to heal the world, in any way, for any person, we are helping to make God's story for the world complete. I'm going to tell you a modern parable to help us think this through. Called, 'Starfish'.

Once upon a time, there was an old man who lived by the ocean. He had a habit of walking on the beach every morning at the start of the day. Early one morning, he was walking along the shore after a big storm had passed, and found the vast beach littered with starfish as far as the eye could see, stretching in both directions.

Off in the distance, the old man noticed a small boy approaching. As the boy walked, he paused every so often and as he grew closer, the man could see that he was occasionally bending down to pick up an object and throw it into the sea. The boy came closer still and the man called out, "Good morning! May I ask what you are doing?"

The young boy paused, looked up, and replied "Throwing starfish into the ocean. The tide has washed them up onto the beach and they can't return to the sea by themselves. When the sun gets high, they will die, unless I throw them back into the water."

The old man replied, "But there must be tens of thousands of starfish on this beach. I'm afraid you won't really be able to make much of a difference."

The boy bent down, picked up yet another starfish and threw it as far as he could into the ocean. Then he turned, smiled and said, "It made a difference to that one!"¹

That is what we do as Salt and Light. We make a difference. And perhaps it doesn't seem more than a drop in the ocean, but it is the most important thing that there is, because it's part of the bigger story of God at work in the world.

The point of our faith is to let it spread. There's that famous image in the Bible of Christians being the body of Christ. And it is true in a very literal way, because God works in the world through us. The hands God uses to care for someone sick or suffering are our

¹ <https://eventsforchange.wordpress.com/2011/06/05/the-starfish-story-one-step-towards-changing-the-world/>

hands. The hearts and minds God uses to fight for justice and equality are our hearts and minds. The words God uses to argue for a fair society, to defend the environment, or to speak out against discrimination are our words. Our faith is so that we can embody God on earth. Our faith is not for ourselves, but for everyone around us, because we are God's storytellers, telling the story of our faith through being the salt and light. One starfish at a time.

That is why the Church isn't this building, or us worshipping together on a Sunday. What the Church really is, is the body of Christ in the world - us, living our normal lives, but letting God use our hands and hearts, so that we spread a trail of words and actions around us, that touch other people's lives for the better. Our faith is for others.

And isn't this amazing? What a gift, to be the hands and hearts and voices that God uses in the world. What a gift, to be part of the bigger story, to be the ones spreading the salt and light to make a change wherever we can. And I want to encourage you to be bold. If you feel like there is something you could do, or a way you can offer your gifts, if you think perhaps God might be nudging you towards something, be bold and go for it! Sometimes we don't know how we could be God's

hands and voice in the world until someone points it out to us, but other times we know we have something to give - we can sense the Spirit nudging us, we can see a way to be salt and light - so then be brave and try it! It is our gift as God's storytellers to make the kingdom of heaven come on earth, even just a little bit, day by day. One action, one decision, one kindness, one starfish at a time. So be brave to offer your hands and voices. Go out, to be salt and light in the world through living the story of your faith for others.

Amen.