

“Let me tell you why you are here¹. “You’re here to be the salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavours of this earth.”

***“You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colours in the world.
God is not a secret to be kept².”***

That’s one version of what Jesus said to his disciples, as recorded in the collection of sayings that is frequently referred to as “The Sermon on The Mount.” Further on in today’s reading, Jesus is reported to have said to his disciples:

Other reports on what Jesus said at that time are worded slightly differently. The Revised Standard Version (RSV), and the New Revised Standard Version read:

“You are the salt of the earth,” and “You are the light of the world”

The King James Version of 1611 uses the phrase “**ye are**”, rather than “**you are**”.

The Living Bible records Jesus as saying:

““You are the world’s seasoning, to make it tolerable.” And “You are the world’s light.”

What is common to all of these reports are the words: “**You are**”. You are salt / you are light. These words are an affirmation of who we are as Christians: “**You are**.” NOT, “You ought to be.” You are The salt of the earth / the light of the world.

This is a blessing. We already are valued and loved by God our Creator!

Frederick Dale Bruner, a commentator on Matthew’s Gospel, writes that these are the: “*You Ares: the ordination of disciples to world service*³.” Christian communities are to be the means of mission for the message of Jesus. This is another part of the blessing – we have a purpose in life – we are here for a reason:

“The deepest desire of Christians, after loyalty to God in Jesus, is to be used by Jesus to help people and, in fact, on the widest scale, to be “the very salt of the earth⁴.”

Remember, when Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment, he responded:

““Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’⁵”

¹ Matthew 5: 13 (The Message)

² Matthew 5: 14 (The Message)

³ Frederick Dale Bruner, The Christbook: Matthew 1 – 12, page 187

⁴ Bruner, page 188

⁵ Mathew 22: 37 - 39

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Right here in this neighbourhood we can see how Christian saltiness has improved the flavour of life for our neighbours. The healing power of saltiness is shown in that;

- Christian communities constructed St. John’s Hospital and Branson Hospital
- Christian communities have healed the lives of their neighbours through affordable housing projects
- Christian – and other faith communities; Jews, Muslims – provide food for our neighbours, who society would rather forget.

That is being salt for the world – changing the flavour to show the world that LOVE OF NEIGHBOUR, is what God dreams of as the colour of compassion.

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In The United Church Observer this month there is a very interesting article about West Hill United Church and their minister, Rev. Gretta Vosper. The article seems to centre on the theology of that congregation, and Gretta’s book, “With or Without God”. It doesn’t pay attention to the sub-title of her book. I think that the sub-title captures what is “salty” about our Christian faith. Gretta’s book is sub-titled:

“Why the way we live is more important than what we believe.”

Salt that is on the shelf is not engaged in the world. It needs to become part of the food to make a difference.

That is part of the message of the prophet Isaiah as well. Religion that is not practiced is not the “fast” that God desires. This is also an echo of the message of the prophet Micah that we heard a week ago⁶.

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If you were to read all of the prayers that were written here on January 23rd, you would find among them the theme of peace. I believe that no sermon this week would be complete without some reference to the peaceful revolution that has been happening in the Arab world, and particularly in Egypt.

This is an extended quote from Jim Douglass: you may remember it as a scene from the movie Gandhi:

Jesus' modern disciple Mahatma Gandhi had a similar emphasis on salt and suffering love. Gandhi identified Britain's monopoly on salt as a symbolic key to India's freedom. Every villager needed salt. By marching to the sea and breaking the imperial law by picking up a pinch of salt, Gandhi chose persecution, redemptive suffering, and freedom. His people followed his example. Millions of them made, bought, and sold salt in defiance of British law. Hundreds were beaten as they advanced on salt works, tens of thousands including Gandhi were jailed, and Britain's rule over India was in effect ended.

⁶ Micah 6: 1 - 8

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On the eve of this freedom campaign, Gandhi said, "Mass civil disobedience will not come if those who have been hitherto the loudest in their cry for liberty have no action in them. If the salt loses its savor, wherewith shall it be salted?"⁷

Somewhere deep in our hearts we know that the way to peace and freedom for all of God's children in God's world is not through violence, but through peaceful revolutions and peaceful demonstrations. This is the wisdom of salt, in contrast to the hostility of the world.

As we watch events unfold in Tahrir Square in Cairo, it might be wise for us to reflect back on the events that unfolded here in Toronto during the G-20 summit, and the actions of, “the state”. Are we as “free” as we think we are?

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Jesus calls us to be light in a world where there is much darkness. ***“be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven⁸.”***

By being salt and light in the world, we show the world a bit of what God is like. We demonstrate to the world a power that is called LOVE. That is why we are here on earth. By being salt and light, in some mysterious way, our souls are nurtured.

Thanks be to God!

HYMN – You Are Salt for the Earth

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http://www.sojo.net/index.cfm?action=resources.sermon_prep&item=LTW_960149_AEpiphany5&week=A_Epiphany_5

⁸ Matthew 5: 16

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Prayers for God's Family and Creation:

In this Epiphany season of light,
Open our minds and hearts O God,
To living as people of salt and light.

Creator God, we pray for your world;
For our neighbours, our sisters and brothers,
Your children who live in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen,
Afghanistan and other places;
that all may move forward to live in a world
Salted and enlightened by justice and peace.

We pray for those who we know;
For Bea Mansfield and Mary Embree
Who are in St. John's Rehab Hospital
And for Mark Henderson who is in North York General Hospital.

In this moment of quiet we pray for ourselves and for those
whose names are written on our hearts;

These prayers we offer humbly in the name of
Jesus Christ, the Light of the world. Amen!

Prayer Response: V.U. # 954 – I Waited for the Lord