

## ***The flavour of God's kingdom***

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

February 9, 2020

by Rev. Dave Le Grand

This Sunday's reading can be considered the sequel to last week's Story of Jesus preaching the "Beatitudes." There Jesus preached his sermon on a mountain, proclaiming, "Blessed are you...": who mourn; blessed are the persecuted for righteousness' sake; and blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Last week I speculated that, it is not very likely that people who fit those categories and who heard his sermon felt very blessed!

In today's Gospel reading, the continuation of that sermon, Jesus says, "You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world."

Ok, this past week has not inspired hope in me for the future generations who inherit the world from me. If our world in disarray were instead ancient Greek theatre, this would be the moment for *deus ex machina* – that is, the gods descending from the mountaintop to remove tyrant leaders from their powerful positions, thus bringing justice to our earth. While those gods are at it, could they perhaps also heal Creation *and* take away the tools from us that threaten our environment?

"Dream on!" Right?

But before you give our leaders too much credit in the fate of our world, consider again that Jesus declared on that mountaintop sermon that: ***You are the salt of the earth***, and ***You are the light of the world***.

We are reminded by one Bible scholar that Jesus' congregation on that mountain are not celebrities who have access to fans who listen to them, or famous preachers who inspire with their brilliant eloquence. No, those hearing this message of Jesus are ordinary people, some probably desperate, some are scared, most probably feel that they don't count for much.<sup>1</sup>

You may remember last week my brief exploration of how Jesus used the word righteousness, the Hebrew biblical concept of being right with both God and with your community – and always remembering our core relationship, the covenant God first made with us.

Jesus uses the righteousness of the Pharisees and Scribes as a standard by which he wants those listeners to compare their lives. After reading the Gospels, we have tended to become programmed to understand the "Scribes and Pharisees" as negative examples of righteousness, especially the way the Gospel of John describes them. Quite the contrary in this reference in Matthew, for Jesus is saying that they *are* righteous, they are good examples. "You." Jesus says here. "God is calling you to be MORE righteous than them!"

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<sup>1</sup> The article by Matt Skinner, "Dear Working Preacher" (Feb 9, 2020) formed the basis for my Message. [http://www.workingpreacher.org/?lect\\_date=02/09/2020&lectionary=rcl](http://www.workingpreacher.org/?lect_date=02/09/2020&lectionary=rcl)

Back to my lament as I began this Message; referring to this past week and feeling sad at the state of affairs in my world: feeling buffeted by the politics of negativity; seeing values like truth and compassion and integrity under fire. It can all push us close to despair, sometimes even feeling tempted to “go negative” ourselves.

I think Jesus in today’s Gospel is saying to the people who feel disempowered, “Aim high in your words and actions. Be righteous in your attitudes and actions.”

Something to ponder if you feel baited into an argument next week with someone that you feel is downright ignorant. I think that in calling us salt and light, Jesus is saying that you and I can make a difference.

You are “Salt” – an essential enhancer of food in ancient time. To be truthful, I’m not a big fan of salt. Me, I love curry. I grew up eating “meat and potatoes” and tended to be lazy in my cooking habits in university, until I rented a house with two brothers of Indian descent. They introduced me to the wonders of curry, and my life was indeed “enhanced”! Whatever your spice is that blesses your food, think of that when you ponder these words from Jesus. How do you use your unique flavour, your gifts that God has given you, to enhance your world?

You know, this world has experienced the particular plague of mis-information and dis-information. I have never easily learned to distinguish this Trojan horse brought to us through social media – the idea of either consciously or unconsciously perpetuating myths, and downright lies by clicking the “Share” button. Too often in everyday conversations, people are perpetuating myths and stereotypes that they have read somewhere in social media. Add to that the fact that modern-day politics has begun to repeatedly frame lies as “facts” and facts as “fake news” – it has programmed a new generation of cynics, and people who doubt that there is any objective truth.

Perhaps a step towards God’s kin-dom work for us is to speak truth, and for us to be vigilant in checking the “truth” we perpetuate in conversations and when using social media. Make no mistake, speaking or hearing truth can be awkward. I know, because I had shared an optimistic Facebook story about how the new Ontario curriculum was to have substantial content teaching our kids about the factual history of how our indigenous peoples have been treated as the nation of Canada was born.

It was no more than five minutes that passed before our United Church of Canada Moderator, the Right Reverend Richard Bott, had commented on my post, very respectfully, that this article was very outdated. He pushed me to look more carefully at the present reality of education in Ontario, and I soon realized that our present Premier has in fact eliminated the expectation of teachers to spend time teaching more history from a First Nations perspective.

Truth is awkward, and it needs to be shared in humility, and with deep respect. It is the flavour of God’s kin-dom coming.

And light – *you are light*.

You have probably been looking at graphic on screen. A prism that refracts light in very particular ways. Refraction reminds us that we are not the source, but we are the *conduits* of God’s light. Light illuminates. What realities in your life need illuminating? Injustice?

Maybe someone here feels the call to speak truth to a person in their life. Maybe someone near and dear to you feels very much like those ancient listeners of Jesus. Maybe a person you know faces great adversity and concludes, "What can I do?" Maybe God's kin-dom is coaxing you to somehow refract God's light and love onto their life in a fresh and affirming way. Maybe *you* need a light bit of illumination, some fresh perspective, in your life.

The world really needs salt and light. *You are* salt and light, Jesus tells us today. So, share your salt (or curry), and light – boldly, lovingly, and humbly. Amen.