



SAINT ANDREW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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Sermon for Sunday, February 5, 2017

The Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

THE REV. SALLY WEBSTER

Isaiah 58:1-12 | Psalm 112:1-9 | I Corinthians 2:1-16 | Matthew 5:13-20

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you O Lord our strength and our redeemer. AMEN.

In today's gospel Jesus speaks of Salt—what would we do without salt? Salt is not good for us to eat —OH! but how much better it makes many of our foods taste. In biblical times salt was extremely important. It was used for preserving fish, meat and even vegetables. In the winter months there would have been little food available if it had not been for the preservative nature of salt. Salt was and is used as a spice to enhance the flavor of foods. The Jews put salt in cereal offerings that they made to God, in order to prevent mold and rotting. Salt was used in medicines and on it's own to heal open wounds and sores. It was extremely important in ministering to the wounded in battle. New born babies were washed in heavily salted water in hopes of preventing diseases and to speed the healing of the severed umbilical cord. Salt was used as currency and was used to make a covenant or a contract with another person. Legend has it that a man's life was as valuable as a bag of salt.

Consider all of the uses for salt in our world today. One huge one that comes to mind for those of us who live through the Michigan winters is road salt, that stuff that helps us navigate the roads and pavements when the snows and ice descend. Salt can be quite harmful and corrosive. Salt can lose it's value if it is not stored and cared for properly.

Salt is as important to us today as it was to our ancestors. So what do we think Jesus means when he says, "You are the salt of the earth;.."? Salt enhances and makes the taste better and that is what Jesus is calling each of us to do—to make all things better. We are to use our faith and our resources to help those in need. We are not to look at the color of a persons skin, or the language that they speak, their cultural differences, or even their religious differences. We are meant to be the salt and draw out the flavors of the world and heal the wounds of the world. Think what a delicious taste it would be if all of those flavors melded together and we all lived in peace with each other and for each other.

Also in our gospel for today Jesus says, "You are the light of the world." Light, like salt, is something that we cannot do without. We must have light if we are to be guided through the darkness of life. Light has so many positive components that make our lives easier and richer but it also has components of destruction. Light can blind us so that we do not see the reality before us.

Salt and light, two things that we must have in our lives and God is looking to us to act like both of these and to enhance the situation of all peoples by displaying our faith and helping to create a world where all people are honoured and respected regardless of who they are.

Jesus is telling us as Christians, like the disciples, that we must shine as light to all the world and that when all people see our good deeds they will join with us and give glory to God, the creator of all life. Jesus also is telling his disciples that they must act as the salt of the earth and do all that they can to preserve and protect the world from corruption and evil. If they can succeed in these things then they will enable all the world to bring forth good fruit instead of bad.

Jesus wanted his disciples to understand that they were being an example to all and that their actions should involve a righteousness greater than that of the Scribes and Pharisees. The Scribes and Pharisees were admired by all for their devotion, learning and strict obedience to all the requirements of the Law. Having to be more righteous than the Pharisees would have seemed impossible to all of Jesus' followers. How could anyone surpass this righteousness? Jesus gives the answer when he calls his disciples salt of the earth and light of the world. For the Pharisees restricted their sphere of good works and care to only the chosen people of Israel. He wanted more than this, He wanted all people to be respected, cared for and loved.

You and I can do exactly what Jesus is asking of his disciples, we can be the salt and the light which serves God. Jesus expects us to have a love that does not discriminate, which reaches out to all in need, regardless of race, nationality, culture, or religious qualifications. This kind of love is what God's Law is all about.

In last weeks Gospel from Matthew we heard the words of the “Beatitudes” from Jesus’ famous “Sermon on the Mount” and today we hear Jesus telling us to go and to salt the earth and to light up the world, to respect and love all. To seek justice and peace among and for all people.