

St Alban's Sermon, 3rd Sunday before Lent, 9 February 2020

Called to be Salt and Light of the World

I came across a story of a man in a small village in the Alps. He was contracted by the local council to maintain the stream that ran through the village from the mountain. For many years he faithfully discharged his duties picking up every twig, and removing leaves and silt that would otherwise impede the natural flow of the stream.

In this way the mills by the stream ran throughout as a result of the steady flow of the water; the environment was picturesque, swans swam freely, and many tourists flocked the tiny village to experience this natural beauty. One day, in a council meeting they voted to scrap the post of this old man, since no one saw him or knew his operation; they were concerned only by their cost cutting measures, after seeing how much the council paid him.

That Autumn the stream was not cleaned and people started noting a tint in the water. The flow was slower, the mills slowed down and the swans left. In the Springtime a foul smell could be detected in the water and before long the mills stopped, the tourist's numbers dwindled, and the village economy suffered. The council then realised the huge mistake they had made and quickly rescinded their decision and reinstated the old man. He diligently did his job and the stream was restored, the mills ran again and village life returned to normal.

Beloved, what the keeper of the springs meant to the village, is what the Christians mean to this world. Christians may seem unimportant, a nuisance to the world and to many who do not believe. But God help any society that attempts to exist without the work and prayers of Christians.

We, Christ's ambassadors, are assigned the position of influencing and impacting our world in a similar way to the elderly man in the Alps. Nowhere in the Scriptures does Jesus state that we are to live in isolation, separated from this world. Jesus is clear - crystal clear - you are *in* the world but not *of* the world.

It is impossible to live, truly live, for the kingdom in private isolation. We are called to make a difference, but sadly that calling has gone largely unfulfilled. Put simply, the church has lost its influence on Society, especially in the western world. There are many reasons why this is so, but one reason stands out far above the rest. The church has lost its influence because Christians have neglected their call.

Our call to be salt, our call to be the light.

And since we have neglected to be what God has called us to be, the world has decided to ignore us or in some cases hate us. Yet the flip side is also true. When Christians decide to be salt and light, to point the way to the saving grace of Jesus, the world will pay close attention. Let me say it simply: When we are salt, when we are light, the world will see ... and the world will listen.

I am convinced that Jesus chose these two metaphors salt and light because of their unique qualities. Both carry an enormous influence, have an immediate impact, are noticed instantly and are difficult to veil or hide. In the ancient world Roman soldiers were paid in salt and would revolt if they did not get their ration.

In fact, our English word "salary" comes from the Latin '*salarium*' which literally means "salt-money." Our expression, "That man is not worth his salt," is a reminder of the tremendous

value of salt to the human body. In the ancient world, as well as today salt is a preservative. Why, because salt retards spoilage.

Likewise, believers who know Jesus as their Saviour and Lord, act like a preservative ... to the world. As we bring Christ's word ... and the Kingdom's influence ... into our society, ... we protect society from the full sway of evil ... that would otherwise ...be unleashed ... on the world.

Salt is also a flavouring, (seasoning) but unless it is brought in contact with an object its influence is wasted. Salt becomes invisible in order to have a visible effect. Salt by itself is nothing more than little, fine particles and in that state, they are worthless. But, when added to food, it becomes invisible and then becomes what it was intended for - to enhance the flavour.

Salt that just sits in a shaker is of no use. It is much like a believer, who becomes complacent who no longer shares grace, who refuses to take a moral stand and refuses to share their faith. They are sitting in the shaker. When Jesus says ... "You are the salt of the earth" He is not saying you should be the salt of the earth or you could be the salt of the earth. He is stating a fact by accepting him as your Saviour and Lord, you are the salt of the earth.

God help us to be the right salt of the earth to flavour the lives of the world.

AMEN.

Revd Tim Ndegwa