5-11 February 2023 Restore the streets

Read the passage from Matthew. It is written below.

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 hidden. 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 fulfil l. 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.’

**Bible notes**

Jesus states that these two natural things have obvious purposes:

* salt to impart saltiness
* light to illuminate.

In this parable, salt can change to lose its saltiness. When this happens, it is no longer good for anything. We may wonder, in what ways can we change for the worse as disciples, or change our essential nature to the point that we are no longer recognisable as disciples? Do we cease to be ‘salty’ when we lose an awareness of our poverty of spirit, for instance; or when we cease to engage with communities as merciful peacemakers who thirst for justice? Salt is a substance that transforms the things that it is mixed with. Is Jesus making a point about the way we engage with those around us?

Light, on the other hand, makes an environment safe. In the days before streetlighting and electric light bulbs, travelling at dusk or in the dark must have been very difficult. Imagine the relief that someone would feel on spotting the light given out by a city on a hill. Domestically, it would make no sense to ignite a light and then to hide it away.

The qualities of character and moral choices described in the context of this passage are to be lived out with others and for others. Jesus’ words about the law in verses 17 to 19 are a preface to intensifying the qualities that God requires of us.

**Reflection**

*Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help:*

Salt describes something that happens internally or within a certain substance – it is immediately identifiable by taste. Light is something that happens externally – outside in the landscape or filling a space.

Perhaps Jesus chose these metaphors to make sure that the inside and outside of life – our interior world of thought, our exterior world of objects and actions – are both covered in our understanding of discipleship. Most of us lean towards one sphere or the other.

* How can we learn to appreciate the outer or inner world that seems less important to us?
* How can we appreciate one another’s differences and work together, so that our strengths are complementary?

**Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues of sharing.*

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**Questions**

* What does it mean to be salt in our world?
* How can we be distinctive and restore the world around us?
* What things would revitalise your area and community?

## Prayer

Adapt to your local context.

### A prayer of thanksgiving

Father God,
thank you that you have prepared for us
far more than we can ever hope, believe or imagine;
no eye, no ear, no heart can conceive
what you have prepared for those who love you.
That is so amazing!
Thank you that you restore us and transform us
to become the people you have called us to be.
Thank you that you are the light of the world.
Thank you that you are the salt of the earth.
Thank you that in you we can be salt and light too,
that we can go out and revitalise our communities,
bringing hope and renewal to our families, our friends,
our neighbours and our churches.
**Amen.**

## **A prayer to end the Bible study**

Light of the world, shine through us.

Like salt of the earth,
scatter us where there is need.

Help us work together
to repair and renew,
to rebuild and rejoice
throughout this place.

In Jesus’ name. **Amen.**

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