

Sibyls Service. Tuesday 25th August, 7.00pm

Called to be Salt & Light

Call to Worship

Creating God,
You call us into becoming,
Trusting us with our one wild and precious life.
Grant us courage to speak our truth,
Wisdom to grow through all our years,
and freedom to serve your kingdom
while becoming most authentically ourselves.
May our lives proclaim your liberating love.

Amen

Prayer by Revd Dr John McNeil Scott, Principal of the Scottish College URC.

Hymn

Have you heard God's voice; has your heart been stirred? (Youtube – Frodsham Methodist Church)

Prayers

Our prayers of adoration and confession, will you pray with me?

Of your own will you have brought into being all things which before were not and by your might you uphold creation and by your providence you uphold the world.

Creator God, in every face we see your love reflected, each person is made in your image, marked by love and precious to you. You have made a world full of diversity, where difference is beautiful and your Spirit moves.

Help us to live free from prejudice: that which is used against us and that which we bear against other people.

Help us to recognise the presence of Christ in each person, in his name we pray.

Amen.

(The Methodist Church, Equally Different?)

A prayer of confession:

Lord our God, as we come to you in prayer, we know you see all we have done all we want to do, the pain and regret we carry, the hopes we hold on to, the things we want to say, still finding shape in our hearts.

Help us to find a way to bring all of that, and still sense your presence amongst us, holding each and every one of us.

You welcome us with open arms, just as we are. In your presence we can just be.

With you, there is no pretending, no brave faces, and no need to say, 'I'm fine' unless we mean it.

Thank you, O God, for your real love; real acceptance.

May we be ready to hear your word and accept your challenge this day, as we seek your life-changing and life-giving love with the world.

Thank you Lord. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer We say together the Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Reflection Reading through the Gospels it can hardly escape your notice that Jesus was a radical. He was, and is, a great disturber. Challenging all vested interests and dubious establishments. 'Give all your riches to the poor.....' 'Unless a man (or woman) be born again.....' and check out the Sermon on the Mount. Its not some cosy homily, but a radical challenge to life. A radically new way of living. And ever the radical, his followers are called to be radically different too.

To be like salt in the world..... To be like light in the world.....

The nature of salt....

Can you think back to the old days when a bag of crisps always had one that was saltier than the rest?
The blue one?

Or times in the chippy when the question 'Salt and vinegar?' would be asked while both were being applied with vigour!

Or there in the kitchen when that memory lapse resulted in the vegetables being salted again – an extra pinch (or two!) for good measure at the risk of spoiling the food. Counter this by the doctor noticing your high blood pressure and advising you to reduce the amount salt in your food, high blood pressure being a major factor in heart disease. And so for a while your taste buds wonder if they'll ever get used to this sensory deprivation. We do, after a fashion, and even start to 'like' salads without salt.

Over the ages salt has had other purposes even, in some societies, being a commodity of great value to the point of being used as a kind of currency. 'Being worth one's salt' comes from being of value, having worth.

I can remember my mum salting kidney beans to preserve them because we didn't have a fridge.

Salt can be used as a disinfectant, rubbed into wounds to prevent infection or to soothe soreness.

One of its properties is that of a little going a long way, unseen, but making a difference.

In the Bible we can find several references to the purifying influence of salt; in Leviticus salt is referred to as a necessary part of any ritual offering made to God. Job refers to salt used for seasoning while in Mark's Gospel are several references to the purifying influence of salt.

Another can be found in Paul's letter to the Colossians: "Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, to that you may know how to answer everyone!"

Nor can we forget the story of Lot's wife – turned, so we are told, into a pillar of salt because she just could not resist the temptation to turn round and look at the destroyed city of Sodom.

Which, I wonder, of the various qualities of salt had Jesus in mind when he told his followers that **they** were the salt of the earth – Having a special value? Being a preservative? Making a difference? Maybe Jesus was likening their effect to that which salt makes on food – hidden, yet making a difference. Making things better through quiet influence. Better through quiet influence.

Jesus also had something to say about salt that had lost its savour.... Worthless, fit for nothing.

The nature of light..

Light – illumination. One of the definitions, in my dictionary describes it as: "the natural agent that stimulates the sense of sight.

Scientists will tell you that light travels at a speed of 300,000km per second. And astronomers will tell you that they use the speed of light to measure distances in space – light years – the distance travelled at the speed of light in one year. Light years – vast, vast, mind-blowing distances.

Biologists will tell you that light is essential for most forms of life; the process of photosynthesis used by plants is one example.

And we put light to special uses as well, don't we? Mood lighting – creating the right ambience for a particular occasion. Spectacular illuminations and laser shows. And how about lasers? Intense beams of light, scientifically created – used for some types of operation and equally capable of cutting through metals.

Around the coast there are lighthouses and lightships usually unmanned these days but there to warn sailors of navigational hazards be they rocks or sands.

In years gone by, beacons would be lit on high ground as a way of sending special messages. Satellite communications make them unnecessary in this day and age but beacons are still lit on very special occasions.

Turning to your Bible you find many references to light. Psalm 27 begins: 'The Lord is my light.....
Psalm 36: '.....in your light we see light'. We see Jesus described as 'the light of the world, the true light.

The opening verses of John's Gospel (CH1, v4) makes reference to Jesus – 'the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it. We find Jesus described in so many different ways as 'the light' and yet he turns to us and says '**You** are the light of the world'. Called to be like him

- Lights that cannot be hid

- Lights that stand out
- Lights that are beacons
- Lights that warn of danger
- Lights that give life

Oh yes, like salt, a little light can make a big difference, Samuel Rayan wrote:

*A candle light is a protest at midnight.
It is non-conformist.
It says to the darkness "I beg to differ!"*

Billy Bray that great Cornish Christian commented about a lighted candle 'that it burned none the worse for every candle that was lighted from it.'

And yet, - and yet, there are times, are there not, when our lights burn dimly in spite of Jesus's call for us, as individuals, to be radically different. The radical demand of Jesus is the requirement to make absolute choices in life style and attitudes. There is power in lives lived according to radical values. There is an impact.

It may be hidden – like salt, or take the form of a more open, visible witness as suggested by the image of light. It does have an effect on our communities and societies. In Isaiah we are given a list of ways in which God's people must act if they are to be like light.....

- To loose the bonds of injustice....
- To let the oppressed go free....

- To share bread with the hungry....
- To house the homeless...
- To cover the naked....

God's message is that passionate commitment to meeting the needs of the needy in practical ways is not separate from spirituality. Jesus' message is no different. Called to be both salt and light we are reminded that salt disinfects, brings out the flavour, preserves, a little goes a long way.

Similarly light is for enlightening, light is for sharing, a candle burns no less brightly... A community alight with vision and love is self-evident. You notice that Jesus didn't tell his followers to become 'sugar'! Has the Church become 'sugar' in spite of this? Do these words by Mark Reaney ring any bells?

*We have a gospel to proclaim
but instead we dilute it to taste
coat it with sugar and give it away
with exciting free gifts,
presenting it
in a choice of appetising flavours.
We have a gospel to proclaim
but instead we speak of mile-wide toothpaste smiles,
bingo bonanzas and angels playing golden harps
on fluffy marshmallow clouds.*

*The gospel which we proclaim does not mention nasty things
like persecution or pain, torture or tears.
We have no time for sweat, blood, crosses or rusty nails.
We want pre-packaged easy to swallow faith
Neatly turned out in Sunday best.
We have a gospel to proclaim
but we have lost something in the translation.*

In calling us to be radically different, as he was radically different, Jesus calls us –

- To be salt in our society – thinking of ways to make things better through quiet influence
- To be the light in our society – considering how it might be appropriate to ‘stand out’ in order to help
- That by being a better salt a brighter light
- That by being radically different through the power that he bestows on us, we can make a radical difference in our society.

At a time when we, as transgendered people are becoming increasingly targeted as an ‘undesirable’ element in society, being the salt of the earth, the light of the world, has never been of greater importance than now.

We make our confession Lord, you placed me in the world to be its salt. I was afraid of committing myself, afraid of being stained by the world. I did not want to hear what ‘they’ might say. And my salt dissolved as if in water.

Response

Forgive me, Jesus.

Lord, you placed me in the world to be its light. I was afraid of the shadows, afraid of the poverty. I did not want to know other people. And my light slowly faded away.

Response

Forgive me, Jesus.

Lord, you placed me in the world to live in community. Thus you taught me to love, to share in life, to struggle for justice, your truth incarnate in my life.

Response

So be it Jesus.

Prayers of Intercession

Will you pray with me?

Living, loving God, we come to you in prayer again as part of our today's act of worship. As we pray, we ask that you would help us to follow in your way, so that each of us:

- may choose light rather than darkness,
- may choose love and not hatred,
- may choose hope and not despair,
- may support those whose sense of frailty brings them close to taking their own lives,

we pray that your Spirit may work within us, transforming the world around us, today and every day.

Living, loving God, guide us this day, as we pray, remembering all people who are overwhelmed by the business and busy-ness of this world, for those who lack clear direction, and who are being led astray.

Today, as we open our newspapers, read the news, turn on radios and televisions, we pray that the leaders of our world and in the media may be people of peace, of wisdom, of grace, choosing paths that lead towards wholeness, light and restoration. Help us to find ways to hold leaders and influencers to account, that they may hear the voice of those who seek justice and peace.

We remember any whose lives are insecure, and are particularly mindful at this time of our transgendered sisters and brothers who, since the Supreme Court's decision to 'clarify' the distinction 'what is man', 'what is woman', are now fearful for their futures, especially our younger brothers and sisters struggling to find their own identity in seemingly hostile situations; denial of further treatment or halted on-going treatment. Those whose pathway to transitioning is stopped or denied. Help us who are able, assist them and their closest family and friends, to chart the very difficult times ahead.

We ask for your comforting hand on those who feel desperate, who struggle to hold onto routine, rhythm or hope, on all whose health is failing, on those who feel their powers to be waning as they become more dependent on others. Give each of us, and those around us, the courage to act with grace, clarity and humanity.

We offer these, and all our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Song Amy Grant **vevo** – Salt & Light www.youtube.com

Blessing & Benediction.

Grace flows from this moment, and from this space,
Grace that changes everything, even me and even you. Go from this gathering place, to see God's grace at work in the world around you, and take the love of Christ with you in your hearts.

We bless each other with the words of the grace:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, now and for ever more. Amen.

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