



FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY **Sunday, February 5th, 2020**

LIGHT, CITIES, SALT, AND ALL THAT!



One of the many salt lakes – in Spanish, “salar” – situated in the Atacama Desert, bordering the Andes

In this season after Epiphany we continue to think about the mission of the Church. Last week we focused upon the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12) which on any score is demanding, requiring of us an ethical sensitivity which few, including Christians demonstrate: in short to see the world and society from the perspective of the victims calls for moral creativity and strength which is remarkable. Last week, we thought about this through the lens of hope and idealism amidst reality and realism. We thought about the relationship between the two. How do we maintain the utopian vision of Jesus while having to function in the real world? We concluded that utopianism and realism need each other: utopianism without realism has no legs, it cannot achieve much at all; but realism without utopianism dies amid its own lack of moral awareness. Part of what Christian mission is about, is to play its part in a complex world, thinking through in concrete ways how the utopian and the real may interact positively, creatively.

Today, we move to other metaphors: salt and light. We will concentrate our thought upon the former: salt. It is a more intriguing and less obvious metaphor, describing the Christian life.

GATHERING

Welcome

In the name of God, the Father
 In the name of the Son
 In the name of the Holy Spirit

The Lord be with
And also with you

Let's Sing: Love Divine (TiS 217, Blaenwern, 590, C. Wesley)

Prayers that Speak of Who and What we are Compelled to become as Followers of Jesus: A City on a Hill, Light-Givers, Salt for the World.

In this introduction to the liturgy, the prayer focuses upon the idea of the “city on the hill”, projecting light and enlightenment: a favourite image of the early Puritan communities of the US in New England, and more broadly, the idea inherent in the expression of the “New World”, used by the early colonizers of the Americas. The sincerity behind the term and its use, clearly varied between peoples and individuals. In the prayer, I focus upon three central ideas in the expression “city on the hill”: city as *sanctuary from oppression* – something used today in the US where cities declare themselves sanctuaries for illegal immigrants, city as a *shining light* projecting kindness and hope; and finally, city as *populous*, as broad and inclusive in its demographic make-up.

The city set on a hill
 is a *sanctuary city*,
 is built of strong bricks
 of compassion,
 is grounded on the bedrock
 of justice,
 has opened its gates
 toward mercy,
 and its windows are wide
 to the sunrise of love
 that blesses the city
 every morning.

Jesus, may we become that city!

The city set on a hill
 is a *shining city*,
 is ablaze with the fire-flame
 of kindness,
 is lit with the radiance
 of forgiveness,
 lights up its night-times
 with hopefulness,
 and its rooftops reflect
 the warm glow of love
 that spills from the city
 every morning.

Jesus, may we become that people!

The city set on a hill
 is a *populous city*,
 is as wide as God's grace
 in Christ Jesus,
 is peopled with those led
 by God's Spirit,
 has walls that are not walls
 but God's welcome,
 and its tree-bowered streets
 lead to peace, in the love
 that *is* the city,
 singing in the morning.

Jesus, may we become your followers!

The Peace

LET'S HEAR THE WORD

Some Curious Sayings about Salt, Light and Cities on a Hill)

Let there be work, bread, water and salt for all. **Nelson Mandela**

This is kind of weird, but I eat lemons with salt as snack. They're so good! **Becky G**

In Mexico, we have a trick - add a crystal of salt to the kettle and the tea tastes better, almost English. But after four pots, your kettle's broken. **Gael Garcia Bernal**

The "city upon a hill" sermon by John Winthrop,, "A Model of Christian Charity", delivered on March 21, 1630 at Holyrood Church in Southhampton, before his first group of Massachusetts Bay colonists embarked on the ship *Arbella* to settle Boston, warned his fellow Puritans that their new community would be "as a city upon a hill, the eyes of all people are upon us", is one of the formative documents outlining the idea of America. But dig deep into its communitarian ethos and it reads more like an America that might have been, an America fervently devoted to the quaint goals of working together and getting along. Of course, this America does exist. It's called Canada."

Sarah Vowell, The Wordy Shipmates

Isaiah 58:1-12 (The Message)

Jeanette Steer

This week the prophet Isaiah uncovers the contradiction that exists among religious people. The sin is not shaped by a conscious rejection of God, but instead is linked to a *piety of sorts*, a belief in God that *masks over* the injustice and brutality that these believers are party to. Isaiah attacks religion when it becomes a vehicle for social narcissism. In this reading, Isaiah exposes the reality, forcing them to gaze into the mirror, to see the problem. In the contemporary translation of "the Message" the title of the text is appropriately headed, "Your Prayers won't Get off the Ground"

58 ¹⁻³ "Shout! A full-throated shout!

Hold nothing back—a trumpet-blast shout!

Tell my people what's wrong with their lives,
face my family Jacob with their sins!

They're busy, busy, busy at worship,
and love studying all about me.

To all appearances they're a nation of right-living people—
law-abiding, God-honouring.

They ask me, 'What's the right thing to do?'
and love having me on their side.

But they also complain,

'Why do we fast and you don't look our way?

Why do we humble ourselves and you don't even notice?'

3-5 “Well, here’s why:

“The bottom line on your ‘fast days’ is profit.

You drive your employees much too hard.

You fast, but at the same time you bicker and fight.

You fast, but you swing a mean fist.

The kind of fasting you do

won’t get your prayers off the ground.

Do you think this is the kind of fast day I’m after:

a day to show off humility?

To put on a pious long face

and parade around solemnly in black?

Do you call *that* fasting,

a fast day that I, GOD, would like?

6-9 “This is the kind of fast day I’m after:

to break the chains of injustice,

get rid of exploitation in the workplace,

free the oppressed,

cancel debts.

What I’m interested in seeing you do is:

sharing your food with the hungry,

inviting the homeless poor into your homes,

putting clothes on the shivering ill-clad,

being available to your own families.

Do this and the lights will turn on,

and your lives will turn around at once.

Your righteousness will pave your way.

The GOD of glory will secure your passage.

Then when you pray, GOD will answer.

You’ll call out for help and I’ll say, ‘Here I am.’

9-12 “If you get rid of unfair practices,

quit blaming victims,

quit gossiping about other people’s sins,

If you are generous with the hungry

and start giving yourselves to the down-and-out,

Your lives will begin to glow in the darkness,

your shadowed lives will be bathed in sunlight.

I will always show you where to go.

I’ll give you a full life in the emptiest of places—

firm muscles, strong bones.

You'll be like a well-watered garden,
 a gurgling spring that never runs dry.
 You'll use the old rubble of past lives to build a-new,
 rebuild the foundations from out of your past.
 You'll be known as those who can fix anything,
 restore old ruins, rebuild and renovate,
 make the community liveable again.

The word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

Matthew 5:13-20 (The Message)

Max Osborne

This reading picks up where Isaiah leaves off. Isaiah criticizes religious piety that masks abuse. Jesus is often attacked for not taking the body of Jewish law seriously, but here he pushes back, here he argues that he comes not to undermine the law but to fulfil it. What he means is that religious rules are not enough, that one can be obedient in the externals and resistant to dramatic internal transformation, to dealing with the demons within. That said, Jesus is not on about promoting the internal at the expense of the external. Interior transformation must lead to external results: hence the idea of salt as an agent that seasons, that changes things.

¹³ “Let me tell you why you are here. You’re here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavours of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You’ve lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage.

¹⁴⁻¹⁶ “Here’s another way to put it: You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colours in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don’t think I’m going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I’m putting you on a light stand. Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.

¹⁷⁻¹⁸ “Don’t suppose for a minute that I have come to demolish the Scriptures—either God’s Law or the Prophets. I’m not here to demolish but to complete. I am going to put it all together, pull it all together in a vast panorama. God’s Law is more real and lasting than the stars in the sky and the ground at your feet. Long after stars burn out and earth wears out, God’s Law will be alive and working.

19-20 “Trivialize even the smallest item in God’s Law and you will only have trivialized yourself. But take it seriously, show the way for others, and you will find honour in the kingdom. Unless you do far better than the Pharisees in the matters of right living, you won’t know the first thing about entering the kingdom.

The Gospel of the Lord
Praise to you Lord Christ

Film Clip: “The Mission”: Being Salt! (53:13 – 56:14)

In the 1740s, Spanish Jesuit priest Father Gabriel enters the north-eastern Argentina and eastern Paraguayan jungle to build a mission station and convert a Guaraní community to Christianity. The Guaraní are not initially receptive to Christianity or outsiders in general, and tie a priest to a wooden cross and murder him, sending him over the Iguazu Falls. Father Gabriel travels to the falls, climbs to the top, and plays his oboe. The Guaraní warriors, captivated by the music, allow him to live.

The story behind the drama of Father Gabriel’s life, is real. The Jesuit order, built a utopia on earth with the Guaraní, where they owned their own plantations rather than work as slaves on those of the Spanish or Portuguese colonists. This was the cause of dissension between the Jesuits and the respective nation states. In this clip, we see a court situation, presided over by Cardinal Altamirano, sent from the Vatican to find a solution to the conflict. Father Gabriel ends up in a face-to-face verbal altercation with the Spanish representative Don Cabeza and his Portuguese counterpart, Señor Hontar, over the truthfulness of Spain’s claim not to practice slavery. The fight builds to a critical moment, when Rodrigo Mendoza, a former slave trader, turned Jesuit, novice, tired of the games played, directly and correctly accuses Don Cabeza of lies.

Being salt in the world, as Father Gabriel and Mendoza, learn only too well requires courage.

Some thoughts...

Let’s Give

Doxology

***Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
 praise him, all creatures here below,
 praise him above, ye heavenly host,
 praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.***

Prayer of Dedication

Sacrament of Holy Communion

Song: The Lord is My Shepherd (TiS 659, My Shepherd, Brian Boniwell, based on Psalm 23)

Invitation

This is the table of the Lord.

It is to be made ready for those who love him and who want to love him more.

So, come, you who have much faith and you who have little, you who have been here often and you who have not been for a long time, you who have tried to follow and you who have failed.

It is our Lord who invites you.

It is his will that those who want him should meet him here.

The Story

Now let us hear the story of how this sacrament began.

On the night on which Jesus was betrayed, he sat at supper with his disciples. While they were eating, he took a piece of bread, said a blessing, broke it and gave it to them with the words, 'This is my body. It is broken for you. Do this to remember me.'

Later on he took a cup of wine, saying, 'This cup is God's new covenant, sealed, with my blood. Drink from it, all of you, to remember me.'

So now, following Jesus' example and command, we take this bread and this wine, the ordinary things of the world which Christ will make special. And as he said a prayer before sharing, let us do so too.

Prayer of Gratitude and Concern

Gratitude, praise, hearts lifted high,
voices full and joyful...these you deserve God.

For when we were nothing you made us something; When we had no name and no faith and no future.

You called us to be your children;
 When we lost our way or turned away,
 you did not abandon us;
 When we came back to you,
 your arms opened wide in welcome.
 And look, you prepare a table for us
 offering not just bread, not just wine,
 but your very self
 so that we may be filled, forgiven, healed, blessed, and made new
 again.
 You are worth all our pain and all our praise.

So, we join our voices to those of the church on earth and in heaven
 and say

(We sing)

***Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might
 heaven and earth are full of your glory.
 Hosanna in the highest.***

***Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the
 highest***

Lord God, as we come to share the richness of your table
 we cannot forget the rawness of the earth.
 We cannot take bread and forget those who are hungry.
 Your world is one world and we are stewards of its nourishment.
Lord, put our prosperity at the service of the poorest of the earth

We cannot take wine and forget those who are thirsty. The ground
 and the rootless, the earth and its weary people cry out for justice.
Lord, put our fullness at the service of the empty

We cannot hear your words of peace
 and forget the world at war.
 Or, if not at war, then preparing for it.

Show us quickly, Lord, how to turn weapons into welcome signs and the lust for power into a desire for peace

We cannot celebrate the feast of your family and forget our divisions. We are one in Spirit but not in fact; history and hurt still dismember us.
Lord, heal your church in every brokenness.

Prayer of Consecration

Lord Jesus Christ, present with us now,
for all that you have done and all that you have promised.
What have we to offer?

Our hands are empty,
our hearts are sometimes full of wrong things.
We are not fit to gather up the crumbs from under your table.
But with you is mercy
and the power to change us.

Send down your Holy Spirit on us
and on these gifts of bread and wine
that they may become for us your body,
healing, forgiving and making us whole;
so that we may become, for you, your body,
loving and caring in the world until your kingdom comes.
Amen.

Among friends, gathered round a table,
Jesus took bread, broke it and said,
“This is my body: it’s broken – for you.”

And later he took the cup of wine and said,
“This is the new relationship with God
made possible because of my death.
Take this – all of you.”

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us.

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us.

O Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, grant us your peace.

Look, look, here is your Lord coming to you in bread and wine.
These are the gifts of God for the people of God.

Distribution

We come forward as a family to partake of the elements together at the Communion Table. The cup on the right-hand side as you face the table is unfermented grape juice and the cup on the left-hand side is alcoholic wine.

Bread and wine are distributed among the people

Concluding Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you have put your life in our hands, now we put our lives in yours.

Take us, shake us, remake us.

May we become as God-like as you are human

Amen

Prayers of the People

Lawrence Peak

Song: Lord hear my praying (TiS 689, Lara, Robin Mann)

Blessing

Add a crystal of salt to the kettle!

Add salt to your lemon!

Be surprised!

Dare to do crazy things!

Be salt, be light!

And the Spirit will be with you

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

In the name of Christ

Amen

We sing: Shalom to you now (TIS 778, Spanish melody, Elise Shoemaker Eslinger)

Closing Postlude

Organist:

Jeanette Steer



The seal of Boston University, Massachusetts betrays its roots. One of the private research universities grounded in the tradition of the United Methodists of the USA, the image on the seal is *the city on the hill*, a pictorial explanation of the commitment to project light and enlightenment through critical learning, reason and their application to the world. This image is grounded in Jesus' Sermon the Mount – the relevant part of which we have read today.