

**St Peter's Sermon – 11/02/2024**

**Fr Chester Lord**

**'Salt & Light: Making an Impact'**

Once upon a time, a quiet forest dweller lived high above an Austrian village along the eastern slopes of the Alps. The old gentleman had been hired many years ago by a young town council to clear away the debris from the pools of water up in the mountain crevices that fed the lovely spring flowing through their town. With faithful, silent regularity, he patrolled the hills, removed the leaves and branches, and wiped away the silt that would otherwise choke and contaminate the fresh flow of water. By and by, the village became a popular attraction for vacationers. Swans floated along the crystal-clear spring, mill wheels of various businesses populated the waterway, farmlands were naturally irrigated, and the view from restaurants were picturesque beyond description.

Years passed. One evening the town council met for its biannual meeting. As they reviewed the budget, one man's eye caught the salary figure being paid the obscure keeper of the spring. The keeper of the purse enquired, "Who is the old man? Why do we keep him on year after year? No one ever sees him. For all we know the strange ranger of the hills is doing us no good. He isn't necessary any longer!" By a unanimous vote, they dispensed with the old man's services.

For several weeks nothing changed. By early autumn the trees began to shed their leaves. Small branches snapped off and fell into the pools, hindering the rushing flow of sparkling water. One afternoon someone noticed a slight yellowish-brown tint in the spring.

A couple of days later the water was much darker. Within another week, a slimy film covered sections of the water along the banks and a foul odor was soon detected. The mill wheels moved slower, some finally ground to a halt. Swans left, as did the tourists. Clammy fingers of disease and sickness reached deeply into the village.

Quickly, the embarrassed council called a special meeting. Realizing their gross error in judgment, they hired back the old keeper of the spring. Within a few weeks the veritable river of life began to clear up. The wheels started to turn, and new life returned to the hamlet in the Alps once again.

This story is more than an idle tale. It carries with it a vividly relevant analogy directly related to the times in which we live.

We, as Christians too, are called to make a difference by influencing and impacting the world around us.

In our Gospel reading, we heard Jesus encourage us to be salt and light unto others in the world. Jesus employs these two brilliant and searching metaphors. Both salt and light can seem commonplace and even insignificant. They can easily be taken for granted. Just like the caretaker in our story. What these two have in common is that just a little bit can go a long way and make a significant impact.

In our day and age of big thinking and large images, why did Jesus commission us to be salt and light?

I think the reason Jesus chose salt and light is because of their unique qualities. Both have immediate impact. Both are difficult to veil and both are ubiquitous.

"You are the salt of the earth" is so famous that it has become a proverb in the English language. If someone is genuine, useful, honest, valuable, and without hypocrisy, we say they are a "*salt of the earth*" type of person.

Roman soldiers were paid in salt and would revolt if they didn't get their ration. Indeed, our English word "salary" comes from the Latin *salarium*, which literally means "salt-money."

In the ancient world the primary function of salt was a preservative. It reduces spoilage. It also offered flavour. In a similar fashion, the early Christians brought spice and zest to the Roman world with their new ideology and radical philosophy.

Furthermore, salt was employed as an antiseptic, healing wounds and discouraging infection. The early church was commissioned to bring restoration and relief to those suffering subjugation, marginalization and oppression.

In another dimension, we as Christians in the Anglican Church today, being the salt of our respective communities, means that we have the ingredient to preserve our values and our institutional characteristics that define us. To invigorate our spirits, our whole- person approach to

spirituality and our valuing of our immediate environment. With the right amount of salt in us, we thirst for knowledge, we value the past and at the same time take in new directions and approaches. Having the right amount of salt in us can also make us active agents for healing and restoration in our relationships here at St Peter's and in the greater community.

Likewise, Jesus not only says that we are the salt of the earth, he also says we are the light of the world. The dictionary defines light as a "*source of illumination.*"

Light, by its very nature, dispels darkness. It reveals things that are hidden. Light awakens. It warns us against danger and it warms us against the cold.

One can, therefore, see why Jesus wanted the early Christians to embody these qualities. To encounter and experience a spiritual awakening, to enlighten, to guide and to sustain them in their early endeavors and to protect them on their perilous missions.

Once again, as modern day ambassadors of Christ, our proverbial lights can be used to dispel darkness, to reveal what may not be known; to awaken us out of our ignorance, or to warn us of what is likely to happen so we can be adequately prepared. Light directs us to pathways to reach our destination; allows us to adapt to a changing environment and makes us observe new and better ways of doing things. Light can be in the form of new knowledge, a view through the lens to a colorful and vivid future. Our love of Jesus and our neighbours, are some ways we can receive, as well as give light, in this ever-dynamic world.

"A city on a hill cannot be hidden". Our influences, however small or great, will be seen. Jesus is calling us to be audio-visual Christians. The Christians' seasoning is something to be tasted. The Christian's luminescence is something to be seen.

Similarly, all who are disciples of Christ have a great sphere of impact too.

So, we too are called to influence our world. Maybe the old keeper of the springs was sometimes taken for granted, but his efforts meant survival to the village in the Alps. Likewise, our investment as salt-seasoning and light-bearing Christians, allows for the opportunity to share God's love and peace in a time when it is sorely needed.

We aren't expected to save the world. But we are called to make a difference. We can't do everything. But we can do something. And what we can do, we ought to do. That's what being salt and light is all about.

So, as we begin the new year, how are we each going to bear a light and be the salt to those that we encounter?

Amen.

