**Matthew 5: 13-20**

**May I speak in the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

You are the salt of the earth. That’s where Jesus starts this part of Matthew 5. Did you know that sodium chloride is the only mineral that we human beings take directly from the earth and eat. So now think about what salt does in food. Used carefully, it sharpens and defines flavours, and it blends them in a way that transforms the potentially bland into something much richer.

‘You are the salt of the earth,’ Jesus said to his disciples.  Note, Jesus did not say that disciples become salt over time but that they just are – which means that each of us is salt too.

The key thing is this though: in order to get the effect in the food, you have to mix the salt in. There’s no benefit to be gained from having the salt near – in the cupboard or on the shelf. It has to be in there. Hold that thought.

The bit of this that I have never quite got though is the bit where Jesus talks about salt losing its saltiness. But then, I never knew until now that the Greek word Jesus uses for losing its saltiness is ***moronos***, which as you might gather, means becomes foolish. If salt becomes foolish, Jesus asks, then what good is it?

The theologian and Trappist monk, Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis explained it like this: a thing is wisest when it is most fully itself, when it tastes most like itself, [when it is] in keeping with its nature. It is foolish when it forgets to be what it is….

So the implication for us of being salt is twofold: first that we exist for being mixed-up with the world, and second that in order to be effective as disciples, we must be ourselves. And that is our real authentic selves, not some construct of what we think we ought to be or what others want us to be, but what God made us to be. So when we become too taken by the world, too wrapped up in all the trappings of the world, we lose something of our humanity; we lost our saltiness. By becoming worldly, we actually, paradoxically, betray the world.

For us to do the gospel bidding of making this world a better place, we need to be out there, being mixed up among people, culture, and society.   It’s not enough to stay safely inside the church community; it’s not enough to develop a strong interior life of prayer and spirituality – although both of those things are important. We need to be outside in the real world, bringing our faith into the world by how we live it.

The preacher and writer Eugene Peterson, who died last year, was asked what he would say if he were writing what he knew would be his very last sermon. He replied, ‘I think I would want to talk about things that are immediate and ordinary. Who are you going to have breakfast with tomorrow, and how are you going to treat that person?

Peterson said we need to stop thinking that being a Christian means always being part of only obvious religious contexts.  We need to be salt in the real world, and that involves genuinely being with real people, listening to them, and treating them as the images of God that they - we - all are.

Consider for a moment how we can think differently. I may not be an aggressive driver – I see myself as a decisive driver – but I do shout a lot in the car. It sort of keeps me interested and entertains me, but it can be disconcerting to anyone who has not been a passenger with me before. And I never took kindly to being carved up on the road.

But at some stage, I started wondering why one driver was flying past doing a hundred, or weaving in and out of lanes – even why people sit resolutely in the middle lane, clogging it up and doing a steady fifty or even less. … What brings them to do any of those things? Is their father in hospital? Or their child having a tough time at school? Has the boss just been mean to them. Or have they had a road accident and are trying to conquer PTSD? I know what that feels like. Of course, none of that gives anyone licence to drive badly or dangerously, but I don’t know what they are going through. Maybe they need a blessing from me, not a curse.

And it is a constant battle – I still shout. And I still complain about bad driving. But gradually I find myself being more tolerant and less shouty – and if we keep practising, finally we recognise that we have changed. We are all in the process of being transformed by God.

Jesus, in today’s passage, talks about the fulfilment of the Law and the prophets, and sees himself as the fulfiller of that Law. That means that we are living in that fulfilment. It is not a future tense thing, but a present tense one. The Kingdom is a ‘here and now’, as well as a ‘not yet’. We can’t block off our thoughts and feelings, but we can foster a disposition in which those are limited.

The Dean of Chelmsford, Nicholas Henshall, has written a key piece about how the Church perceives itself, which I happened to read yesterday. And in it he asks: What if the Church is not an organisation but a relational culture?

As Christians, we grow in relationship with others as well as with God – we support each other and we call each other to account. And that growth comes from our communal spiritual practices. This, as Nick Henshall said, is a relationship we are committed to – and we commit to it by being in church Sunday by Sunday - because it is a journey we need to invest in as well as receive with gratitude.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Go out and be salt in His world. And come to share in the fellowship and relationship of church in order that we might help each other to keep our saltiness.

**Amen**