

Service at Home for Sunday 29th August 2021

Opening Words - Psalm 119: 10-16 (The Message)

- ¹⁰I'm single-minded in pursuit of you;
don't let me miss the road signs you've posted.
- ¹¹I've banked your promises in the vault of my heart
so I won't sin myself bankrupt.
- ¹²Be blessed, GOD;
train me in your ways of wise living.
- ¹³I'll transfer to my lips
all the counsel that comes from your mouth;
- ¹⁴I delight far more in what you tell me about living
than in gathering a pile of riches.
- ¹⁵I ponder every morsel of wisdom from you,
I attentively watch how you've done it.
- ¹⁶I relish everything you've told me of life,
I won't forget a word of it.

StF 73 Fill thou my life, O Lord my God

Fill thou my life, O Lord my God
In every part with praise
That my whole being may proclaim
Thy being and Thy ways

Fill every part of me with praise
Let all my being speak
Of Thee and of Thy love, O Lord
Poor though I be and weak

Not for the lip of praise alone
Nor e'en the praising heart
I ask, but for a life made up
Of praise in every part

So shall Thou, gracious Lord, from me
Receive the glory due
And so shall I begin on earth
The song forever new

Praise in the common things of life
Its goings out and in
Praise in each duty and each deed
However small and mean

So shall no part of day or night
From sacredness be free
But all my life, in every step
Be fellowship with Thee

Horatius N. Bonar (1808-1889)

Prayers

Re-read verses 12-14 of the Psalm above. Pray these words, telling God what you feel – even if you feel very different.

Praise God in your own words.

Read verses 10-13. Ask God to forgive you for when you live has not lived up to these verses.

Think about Jesus. What does he mean to you? Thank God for the love you see on the cross – God prepared to live and die for you.

Ask God to help you to be open to is Word today.

Place yourself and this time of worship in his hands.

Reading – Matthew 5:13-20

¹³ 'You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

¹⁴ 'You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

¹⁷ 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. ¹⁸ For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practises and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

StF 164 Your words to me are life and health

Your words to me are life and health;
They fortify my soul,
Enable, guide, and teach my heart
To reach its perfect goal.

Your words to me are full of joy,
Of beauty, peace, and grace;
From them I learn your blessed will,
Through them I see your face.

Your words to me are light and truth;
From day to day they show
Their wisdom, passing earthly lore,
As in their truth I grow.

Your words are perfected in One,
Yourself, the living Word;
Within my heart your image print
In clearest lines, O Lord.

George Currie Martin (1865-1937)

Sermon

When we think of salt, we think of something that's not healthy if we have too much of it. That would never have occurred to Jesus' audience. But of course we do need a certain amount of salt and some food can be bland without it (like chips, for example). If I asked you for an alternative use for salt, quite a few might say that it is a preservative and can stop meat from going off.

Those who first heard Jesus' words: 'You are the salt of the earth' might have had other uses come to mind. There are many references to salt in the Bible, including references to using salt in sacrifices and when referring to God's Covenant with his people. But many of the references are negative, alluding to destruction, or scattering salt on the ground after a battle as a disparaging act, or of judgement. Salt plains are described as desolate wastelands, but I've also read that in specific circumstances, salt can be used as a fertilizer.

So, what did Jesus mean when he said that his followers are 'the salt of the earth'? The sense when read in context, following the Beatitudes (where he is encouraging his followers to keep going even under persecution and hardship) implies that the point is not what 'salt' represents, but that it must remain true to its nature. If salt no longer preserves meat, or enhances the flavour of food, or works as fertilizer it is useless. If it doesn't continue to do what we need it to do, it is rubbish and needs throwing out.

A few months ago, I finally tackled a kitchen cupboard where Neil used to keep his herbs and spices. Many were way past their 'best before' date and whilst many still retained the correct smell, some had lost their aroma – so were of no use whatsoever. I hate waste and found it hard to throw them out – but there was no point in keeping them, and I needed the cupboard space.

And so, Jesus is warning his followers that if they choose to no longer serve their calling, they are of no use to the Kingdom. That is not to say that God calls us to fulfil the roles we once did when we are no longer able to. God calls us on to new tasks and some to a ministry of encouraging, or listening, or praying, or sharing his love with carers and so on. But if we lose interest in the Christian life and give up on seeking God in our lives – well, Jesus words apply:

'But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.'

Need I say more?

What do you understand when someone is describe as 'the salt of the earth'? My understanding is that the person is simple, honest, industrious and humble. I would much prefer to be called this than to be seen as some sort of prima donna, with ideas above my station! People who are the salt of the earth can be relied upon to get stuck in and do what is needed without persuasion or nagging, people who see needs and do what is necessary to care for anyone.

Christians that fulfil the instruction to be the salt of the earth are dedicated to God, and love as Jesus did, putting other's first and, without any conscious intention, show God's nature in the way they live and treat others.

The task of Christians is to live as God calls us – to promote the values of the Kingdom of God and to share Christ with others. It's a broad brief, and exactly how each individual should serve God is up to God.

First, we must believe that God knows us and wants us to do specific things for him. Second, we need to open our selves to his voice and actively ask what we can do for him. Third, we need to get on with it!

We have many 'uses' and we need to make sure that God can use us as he chooses. Salt can preserve, enhance, destroy, be part of chemical processes, promote growth. It depends on the situation and need.

We are all salt – but may be used by God in very different ways in different situations. No one way of serving God is more important than another, as long as we are true to ourselves and to God's chosen tasks.

Keep on asking, listening to and living for God. Keep being salty, being light and bringing God glory. Amen

Prayers of intercession

God of justice, we live in an unjust world.

We are all too aware that shame stalks the corridors of power and that hypocrisy is second nature to many.

God, in your mercy, remove the dinginess of disgrace and discrimination, revealing truth, promoting light, and calling the world to see the witness of your beloved Son. Grant us all wisdom in how we conduct our lives and in how we interact with others. Make us doers of your word and bringers of peace.

Where there is nothing but cruelty, may we plant the seeds of kindness.

Where life is full of the fake and the false, make us advocates of truth.

May those in power not be trigger-happy with their retorts, but thoughtful and wise.

Give us discernment in how we respond to the myriad voices and the plethora of opinions that surround us in today's world.

May we seek what is genuine.

May we choose what is real.

[Pray for the situations and people that concern you asking God to show you how you can be salt and light in those situations]

For Jesus' sake.

Amen.

StF 505 Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go

Forth in thy Name, O Lord, I go,
my daily labour to pursue;
thee, only thee, resolved to know
in all I think or speak or do.

The task thy wisdom hath assigned,
O let me cheerfully fulfill;
in all my works thy presence find,
and prove thy good and perfect will.

Thee may I set at my right hand,
whose eyes mine inmost substance see,
and labor on at thy command,
and offer all my works to thee.

Give me to bear thy easy yoke,
and every moment watch and pray,
and still to things eternal look,
and hasten to thy glorious day.

For thee delightfully employ
whate'er thy bounteous grace hath
given;
and run my course with even joy,
and closely walk with thee to heav'n.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Blessing

Lord, go with us into our everyday lives, to honour you in all that we do and say.

May our being and doing reflect your love and your grace.

And when we next meet, may we recognise with thanks the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

The blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us now and always

Amen.