

## WINCHESTER, EASTLEIGH & ROMSEY CIRCUIT

### Service at Home Sunday 5th February 2023

prepared by the Revd John Archer

#### Introduction

Last week the lectionary lesson was the passage setting out the Beatitudes - introducing the Sermon on the Mount. The next 3 chapters in Matthew develop the theme that Jesus has come to fulfil the law and the prophets. This is the context of today's lesson which is a gateway for what is to follow.

#### A Prayer (Chair of the Birmingham District)

Gracious God we pray for a vision for your Church in the present age, that we may be communities of good news rooted and grounded in the love of Jesus. Open us out to the movement of your Holy Spirit, so that our worship is a heartfelt response to the Spirit's love and we are empowered to live out our calling with confidence and grace. Help us to focus on the things that really matter to you and to your people, so that we may be signs and agents of your kingdom.

#### Read pray or sing StF 228

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uO2ru0vRv3Q>

- 1 Hail to the Lord's Anointed,  
great David's greater Son!  
Hail, in the time appointed,  
his reign on earth begun!  
He comes to break oppression,  
to set the captive free,  
to take away transgression,  
and rule in equity.
- 2 He comes, with succour speedy,  
to those who suffer wrong;  
to help the poor and needy,  
and bid the weak be strong;  
to give them songs for sighing,  
their darkness turn to light,  
whose souls, condemned and dying,  
are precious in his sight.
- 3 He shall come down like showers  
upon the fruitful earth;  
love, joy, and hope, like flowers,  
spring in his path to birth;

before him, on the mountains,  
shall peace the herald go;  
and righteousness, in fountains,  
from hill to valley flow.

- 4 Kings shall fall down before him,  
and gold and incense bring;  
all nations shall adore him,  
his praise all people sing;  
to him shall prayer unceasing  
and daily vows ascend,  
his kingdom still increasing,  
a kingdom without end.
- 5 O'er every foe victorious,  
he on his throne shall rest;  
from age to age more glorious,  
all-blessing and all-blest.  
The tide of time shall never  
his covenant remove;  
his name shall stand for ever,  
his changeless name of Love.

James Montgomery (1771-1854)

#### Prayers

All loving God

in reverence we come to you  
to proclaim your greatness  
to acknowledge your power  
to declare your goodness.

Compassionate and caring God

with grateful hearts we come to praise you  
for your love which constantly surrounds us  
for all the blessings of our lives  
for the hope of our faith in Christ.

Merciful and forgiving God

in sorrow and shame we come before you  
to confess our unworthiness  
to confess we have not loved you  
or one another as we should  
we have failed to appreciate your many gifts  
and broken your commandments.

Living and life-giving God

we pray for ourselves, and one another  
to bring the concerns of daily life to you  
to lift our loved ones into your presence  
to commit the affairs of our world to you.

Lord of all, we offer you this time of worship  
our praise, our thanksgiving  
our confession, our petition

Respond to us we pray  
touch our hearts with your living presence  
and fill our lives with your grace,  
so that our love for you may grow,  
our faith be deepened,  
and our service strengthened.  
Lord of all, hear our prayer  
in the name of Christ, Amen.

### **Bible Readings**

Isaiah 58: 1 – 9          Matthew 5: 1 – 12

### **Read pray or sing StF 255**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vavK1736mQM>

The kingdom of God is justice and joy,  
for Jesus restores what sin would destroy;  
God's power and glory in Jesus we know,  
and here and hereafter the kingdom shall grow.

The kingdom of God is mercy and grace,  
the prisoners are freed, the sinners find place,  
the outcast are welcomed God's banquet to  
share and hope is awakened in place of despair.

The kingdom of God is challenge and choice,  
believe the good news, repent and rejoice!  
His love for us sinners brought Christ to his cross,  
our crisis of judgement for gain or for loss.

God's kingdom is come, the gift and the goal,  
in Jesus begun, in heaven made whole;  
the heirs of the kingdom shall answer his call,  
and all things cry glory to God all in all!

Bryn Rees (1911-1983)

### **Intercessory Prayers**

Spend some time quietly praying for people or  
concerns that are close to you at this time - and  
for particular concerns in the news today.

Let us pray for those whose daily work gives  
them power over other people:

For those concerned in government

For those in charge of companies

For the leaders of trade unions

For those whose work influences how we think.  
Lord we pray that they may not shirk those  
responsibilities that go with their power, and  
may serve, not only their own interests, but  
those of others, with wisdom, honesty, fairness  
and kindness.

Let us pray for those who work for the public  
services in our society

For those who look after our health,

For those who look after our safety,

For those who teach and train,

For those who give advice and support.

For those who provide the essentials for life.

Lord we pray that these people may find  
satisfaction and joy in their work, and may serve  
those they seek to help with patience, courage  
and understanding.

Lord we pray for those whose work is not  
rewarded by a wage.

For voluntary workers in areas of need

For parents and carers,

For those who fundraise for charity

For those who serve as community leaders

Lord we pray that society may value these  
people and give them the support that they  
need. We pray that they may fulfil their duties  
with humility and generosity of spirit.

Let us pray for those who are unable to go  
about their daily lives and work.

For those who are unemployed,

For those who are ill,

For those who have been injured,

For those recently bereaved

Lord we pray for these people whose normal  
activity has come to a standstill. We ask that  
you will be with them through the changes in  
their lives, bringing healing, hope, comfort and  
meaning.

Lord you have work for each one of us. Teach us  
to serve you in all we do - In the name of Jesus  
Christ, carpenter, teacher and healer, our  
Saviour and your Son. Amen

### **Sermon**

In this section of Matthew's gospel, Jesus is  
calling the Israel of his day to *be* Israel indeed  
now that he is there. What he says can be  
applied to all Christians. God called Israel to be  
the salt of the earth, but Israel was behaving  
like everyone else with power politics, factional  
squabbling, militant revolutions. How could God  
keep the world from going bad (the main  
function of salt in the ancient world), if Israel,  
his chosen 'salt' has lost its distinctive taste?

The gospel passage begins with “*you are the salt of the earth*”. It is a phrase deeply rooted in our understanding. We are each privileged to know people about whom this phrase rings true. They are good worthy, unassuming people who quietly go about their daily lives living for others in a way that is self-sacrificial. As I thought about this link between salt and the Christian, random connections came into my mind. Three have more substance and I will develop those later but I thought I would share the others – you might find one of them helpful –

#### **Salt is salt because it is different -**

When asked “What does salt taste like?” the only answer is “it tastes like salt”. It is unique. The influence of a Christian should be a unique force in the world.

#### **Salt needs to be scattered -**

In fact it is usually distasteful any other way. If left in the salt shaker it absorbs damp and soon hardens. It is best when spread. We need to show in our lives what Christ has done for us. We need to be used.

#### **Salt is composed of many different sized grains**

When viewed through a microscope, salt grains are different sizes and shapes. Christians are this way too. All Christians of all ages make up the salt of the earth.

#### **Salt never calls attention to itself except when it is in the wrong place -.**

When sprinkled on food it brings out the natural flavour. One is hardly aware of its presence. But don't sprinkle it on ice cream! If the Christian compromises with the world's ways, we can soon find that we are in the wrong place.

There are, however, three special qualities of salt which deserve more attention. In the ancient world salt was a highly valued commodity and was in people's minds in these ways.

### **1 Purity**

No doubt its glistening whiteness made the connection easy. The Romans said that salt was the purest of all things because it came from the purest of all things – the sea and the sun. Salt was the most primitive of all offerings to the gods and Jewish offerings were offered with salt. So then if a Christian is to be the salt of the earth, he must be an example of purity. One of

the characteristics of the world today is, I believe, a lowering of standards. Honesty, conscientiousness, standards of diligence at work and moral standards are all lower. This is, of course, a generalisation and many exceptions are found. A Christian needs to be a person who holds aloft high standards of purity in speech, conduct and thought.

### **2 Preservative**

In the ancient world salt was the commonest of all preservatives. It was used to stop things going bad. That was the rule until the advent of modern refrigeration. For centuries sailors have kept large quantities of salt on board to preserve the food that they took for their long voyages. So if salt preserves from corruption and the Christian is to be the salt of the earth, he must have a certain antiseptic influence on life. We all know that there are certain people in whose company it is easy to be good and that there are certain people in whose company it is easier to relax your standards. The Christian needs to be someone who, by their presence, makes it easier for others to be good.

### **3 Flavour**

Salt brings out the flavour of things. I do not sprinkle salt over any of my food except a boiled egg - which is not the same without the salt! My wife, when she was about 7, lived in Solihull in one of a row of modest 3 bed semis. A few doors along lived Frank Smith who owned a couple of fields where he grew potatoes. He branched out with a new business by slicing potatoes very thinly, frying them to become crisp and brown. Then he sold them in packets for a snack. The new idea had quite a low take up. Then he tucked a little pinch of salt wrapped in blue paper into each packet. (Older readers will no doubt remember them). His business boomed so that he had to purchase much more farm land to grow his potatoes. In Great Britain alone many millions of packets of crisps (originally just Smith's Crisps) are sold every week and the business spread overseas. Now (with a different company) it provides Gary Lineker with a good income!!). Food without salt is often insipid. Christianity is to life what salt is to food. It lends flavour. The tragedy is that so often people have connected

Christianity with the exact opposite – that it takes the flavour out of life. The US poet and academic Oliver Wendell Holmes once said “I might have entered the ministry if certain clergymen that I knew had not looked and acted so much like undertakers”. Robert Louis Stevenson once entered in his diary, as if recording an extraordinary phenomenon, “I have been to church today and am not depressed!”

We need to discover the lost radiance of the Christian faith. In a worried world, the Christian should be the one who can remain serene. In a depressed world the Christian should be the one who retains the joy of life. There should be a sparkle about us. Wherever we are, we must be diffusers of joy.

### **The sting in the tail !!**

Jesus went on to say that if the salt had become insipid, it was fit only to be thrown out and trodden on by men. This is a difficult passage because salt does not normally lose its flavour and its saltiness. We do have a clue as to what he meant, however. In Palestine the ordinary oven was frequently out of doors. It is built of stone on a base of tiles. In such ovens, in order to retain the heat, a thick bed of salt is laid under the tile floor. After a certain length of time the salt perishes. The tiles are taken up, the salt removed and thrown on the road outside the door of the oven. It has lost its power to heat the tiles and is thrown out. It is then walked on by people passing by. That may well be the picture here. But the essential point remains, whatever the picture, and it is a point which the New Testament makes again and again, uselessness invites disaster. If a Christian is not fulfilling his purpose as a Christian then he is on the way to disaster. We are meant to be the salt of the earth and if we do not bring to life the purity, the antiseptic power and the radiance that we ought, then we invite disaster.

We may ask where are the ancient Christian churches of Asia Minor, of Antioch, of Constantinople and of Alexandria? They are trodden underfoot! Over the entrance of a Damascan mosque, you can read the faint and half obliterated inscription “The Kingdom of Christ is an everlasting kingdom!” But above these faded words, there is an inscription in

bold letters - *There is no god but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet.*

The salt has lost its savour!!

### **Dedication Time**

Lord bless our gifts for your use and us in your service.

### **Read pray or sing StF 489**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wtbVB0-Julg>

- 1 All I once held dear, built my life upon,  
all this world reveres, and wars to own,  
all I once thought gain I have counted loss;  
spent and worthless now, compared to this.  
*Knowing you, Jesus, knowing you,  
there is no greater thing.  
You're my all, you're the best,  
you're my joy, my righteousness,  
and I love you, Lord.*
- 2 Now my heart's desire is to know you more,  
to be found in you and known as yours.  
To possess by faith what I could not earn,  
all-surpassing gift of righteousness.
- 3 Oh, to know the power of your risen life,  
and to know you in your sufferings.  
To become like you in your death, my Lord,  
so with you to live and never die.

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

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### **Blessing**

Whoever you are, wherever you go,  
whatever your strengths,  
whatever your weaknesses, God will be with  
you to hold, to heal, to guide and to bless.  
Go then in peace, assured of his love - **Amen**

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### **Acknowledgements:**

*Prayers based on prayers by Nick Fawcett & Christine Odell*