

Dear friends,

I hope that this week finds all going as well as you could hope. We have two readings today focussing on two themes – the impossibility of concealing true discipleship from people around us – and fulfilling the spirit and purpose of the Law rather than merely its letter. The light of God reveals hypocrisy and shows the way to living out our relationship with him and with our fellow human beings in the world for all to see. Every blessing, *Margaret*.

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**Call to worship:**

‘Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.’

We come before you now to receive more of your light in our lives, so that we can get to know you better and worship you. Amen.

When our words are not enough – how should we act?

When our actions seem too little – how should we pray?

God calls us to speak and act and pray, that others will see and praise God through the light that shines from us. Amen.

Lord, open our eyes to those who need help.

Keep us from giving up when it seems too difficult to help everyone.

Help us to remember that you renew and restore and let us be as salt and light in all the places around us. Amen.

**The words to ‘beauty for brokenness’ written by Graham Kendrick [b.1950]      Singing the Faith 693**

1 Beauty for brokenness, hope for despair, Lord in your suffering world, this is our prayer.

Bread for the children, justice, joy, peace, sunrise to sunset, your kingdom increase.

2 Shelter for fragile lives, cures for their ills, work for all people, trade for their skills.

Land for the dispossessed, rights for the weak, voices to plead the cause of those who can’t speak.

*God of the poor, friend of the weak, give us compassion we pray.*

*Melt our cold hearts, let tears fall like rain; come, change our love from a spark to a flame.*

3 Refuge from cruel wars, havens from fear, cities for sanctuary, freedoms to share.

Peace to the killing-fields, scorched earth to green, Christ for the bitterness, his cross for the pain.

4 Rest for the ravaged earth, oceans and streams plundered and poisoned – our future, our dreams.

Lord, end our madness, carelessness, greed; make us content with the things that we need.

*Refrain*

5 Lighten our darkness, breathe on this flame until your justice burns brightly again.

Until the nations learn of your ways, seek your salvation and bring you their praise.

*Refrain*

**Prayers:**

Light of the world, may your light shine in us – may your light shine out of us – and may your light shine on all in our communities, as we worship you today. Amen.

Restorer God, we praise you for who you are – our healer and redeemer.

Your light has broken forth like the dawn. You came into our darkness to live among us, your body broken on the cross so that we might live.

We cry out to you and you respond: 'here I am'.

Transforming God, we adore you. Amen.

Lord, for the times when we have not been salt, and so failed to reveal your flavour to the words around us – forgive us, good Lord.

For the times when we have hidden our light, either deliberately or unthinkingly – Forgive us, Lord.

For the times when we thought only of ourselves – when our light has been powered by self, and not by you, our God – forgive us, Lord.

For the times when we carry on regardless, despite and through our mistakes – forgive us, Lord.

May we be your light and flavour wherever we are and whatever we do. Amen.

Forgiving God, we thank you that even when we let you down - when we have not acted as you would – when we have allowed our light to fade and our saltiness to lose its flavour – still we are forgiven and healed and restored in you – ready to go out and shine for you. Amen.

Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come and thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

### **Isaiah 58: 1- 12: [The Message]**

“Shout! A full-throated shout! Hold nothing back – a trumpet-blast shout!

Tell my people what is wrong with their lives, face my family Jacob with their sins. They are busy, busy, busy at worship, and love studying all about me. To all appearances they are a nation of right-living people – law abiding, God-honouring.

They ask me: ‘What is 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?’ Well, here is 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 also 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 your 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?

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 mis: 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 round at once. Your righteousness will pave your way.

The God of glory will secure your passage. Then when you pray, God will answer. You will call out for help and I will say, ‘Here I am’

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 your lives to the down-and-out – your lives will begin to glow in the darkness – your shadowed lives shall be bathed in sunlight. I will always show you where to go – I will give you a full life in the emptiest of places – firm muscles, strong bones. You will be like a well-watered garden – a gurgling spring that never runs dry. You will use the old rubble of past lives to build anew, to rebuild the foundations from out of your past. You will be known as those who can fix anything – restore old ruins, rebuild and renovate and make the community liveable again.

**Comment:**

This passage declares that the people's perception of their relationship with God was based on all the wrong things. They were keen on drawing near to God, but framed this in terms of their religious practices such as praying and fasting. The prophet pointed out that their day-to-day behaviour gave the lie to their faith. They wanted 'righteous judgements' from God, but were unwilling to act righteously themselves. They oppressed their workers and ignored the poor and hungry. They pointed the finger and spoke evil of others. Their extravagant, outward, one-off gestures did nothing to repair the injustice of their everyday lives. The light would only break forth like dawn when they stopped oppressing others, when they fed the hungry.

Fulfilment of the Law meant liberating the oppressed and helping the poor – but these demands are accompanied by promises of joy and prosperity – of God's continued guiding presence.

Here is yet another chance for the people to renew their covenant relationship with God.

A challenge for us too. It is just as bad for us to go through the motions of worship if we don't practise the justice and compassion that are fundamental to *shalom*, God's peace.

**Matthew 5: 13-20**

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.

You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 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. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

**Meditation [of Zebedee, a Galilean fisherman]. [Nick Fawcett – *No Ordinary Stories*]**

Salt. You can't get much more ordinary than that, can you?

We've got masses of the stuff – enough in the Dead Sea alone to supply the world's needs, I shouldn't wonder!

So when Jesus turned to us the other day and told us: 'You are the salt of the earth', you can well appreciate why I scarcely batted an eyelid – it was hardly the highest accolade he could have given us, was it?

At least, that's what I thought then; only now I'm having second thoughts, for it's struck me just how much we use salt for – preserving – purifying – seasoning – even healing wounds on the odd occasion. Such remarkable properties for so commonplace a substance. It's one of those things we take for granted, isn't it? – until we haven't got it, and then, suddenly, we realise how much it's needed and how vital a role it has.

Is that what Jesus was saying to us – that our role too [though in a different sense, of course] is to preserve and purify – to bring a little extra sparkle and spice into life – to help heal this bleeding, broken world of ours? Not in any pretentious way – blowing our own trumpet or parading our virtues – but quietly, without fuss, our contribution barely noticed yet indispensable nonetheless – the world a poorer place without our service.

It's a thought, isn't it? – inspiring – daunting – breath-taking and humbling; though it's hard to believe for the thought of us making such an impact is quite frankly incredible.

Yet just imagine if we could – what a ministry that would be!

And, come to that, isn't that exactly what we see in Jesus – in his life lived for others, and his way of unassuming service, gently yet irrevocably transforming the world.

I was wrong, wasn't I, for in that simple illustration he paid us the highest compliment possible and issued the most awesome of challenges.

'You are the salt of the earth' – you can't get much more special than that, can you?

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you for the difference you have made both to our own lives and to the experience of so many people like us.

We thank you for the difference you have made to our world, working through countless individuals and transforming innumerable situations across the centuries.

You call us, in turn, to make a difference – to help bring joy, hope, healing, to those who are hurting – to all who have lost their sense of purpose or faith in the future.

Forgive us for often failing to honour that calling, our discipleship making such a feeble impact on those around us.

Teach us to be salt of the earth and fit for use in your service, to the glory of your name. Amen.

**Prayers:**

Lord, we think of all the people in the world who seek to share your light, often at great personal cost; those near to us, and those far away; those we know and those who are strangers.

We pray for them – long may their light shine.

We think of all who give their much – of their time and of themselves – to help to lead us to you.

Lord

We think of our families, our friends and our colleagues, people in our lives who are special to us.

We think of those in our church family who are facing difficult times – illness, family problems and other needs perhaps known only to them.

We think of ourselves, that we might bring flavour to the world.

We pray that we may touch base with you daily, and always be prepared to share you with others.

We pray for ourselves that long may our light shine to your praise and glory. Amen.

**The words to 'A Touching Place' written by John L. Bell and Graham Maule. Songs of Fellowship 685**

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1 Christ's is the world in which we move, Christ's are the folk we are summoned to love,  
Christ's is the voice which calls us to care, and Christ is the One who calls us here.

*[Refrain after each verse.] To the lost Christ shows his face, to the unloved he gives his embrace:*

*To those who cry in pain or disgrace, Christ makes with his friends a touching place.*

2 Feel for the people we most avoid – strange or bereaved or never employed.

Feel for the women and feel for the men who fear that their living is all in vain.

3 Feel for the parents who've lost their child, feel for the women whom men have defiled,

Feel for the baby for whom there's no breast, and feel for the weary who find no rest.

4 Feel for the lives by life confused, riddled with doubt, in loving abuse;

Feel for the lonely heart, conscious of sin, which longs to be pure but fears to begin.

**Closing Prayer:**

Christ leads us out, back into his world to live by his word, and to reflect his light and love and to be his fragrance in the days ahead.

Go with us always and guide us, good Lord. Amen.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us now and for ever more. Amen.