

## READINGS

1 Corinthians 2:1-13 The Message (MSG)

**2**<sup>1-2</sup>You'll remember, friends, that when I first came to you to let you in on God's master stroke, I didn't try to impress you with polished speeches and the latest philosophy. I deliberately kept it plain and simple: first Jesus and who he is; then Jesus and what he did—Jesus crucified.

<sup>3-5</sup>I was unsure of how to go about this, and felt totally inadequate—I was scared to death, if you want the truth of it—and so nothing I said could have impressed you or anyone else. But the Message came through anyway. God's Spirit and God's power did it, which made it clear that your life of faith is a response to God's power, not to some fancy mental or emotional footwork by me or anyone else.

<sup>6-10</sup>We, of course, have plenty of wisdom to pass on to you once you get your feet on firm spiritual ground, but it's not popular wisdom, the fashionable wisdom of high-priced experts that will be out-of-date in a year or so. God's wisdom is something mysterious that goes deep into the interior of [God's] purposes. You don't find it lying around on the surface. It's not the latest message, but more like the oldest—what God determined as the way to bring out [God's] best in us, long before we ever arrived on the scene. The experts of our day haven't a clue about what this eternal plan is. If they had, they wouldn't have killed the Master of the God-designed life on a cross. That's why we have this Scripture text:

No one's ever seen or heard anything like this,  
Never so much as imagined anything quite like it—  
What God has arranged for those who love him.

But *you've* seen and heard it because God by his Spirit has brought it all out into the open before you.

<sup>10-13</sup>The Spirit, not content to flit around on the surface, dives into the depths of God, and brings out what God planned all along. Who ever knows what you're thinking and planning except you yourself? The same with God—except that [God] not only knows what [God is] thinking, but [God] lets *us* in on it. God offers a full report on the gifts of life and salvation that

[God] is giving us. We don't have to rely on the world's guesses and opinions. We didn't learn this by reading books or going to school; we learned it from God, who taught us person-to-person through Jesus, and we're passing it on to you in the same firsthand, personal way.

## **Matthew 5:13-20**

### **Salt and Light**

13 'You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

14 'You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden.<sup>15</sup>No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup>In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to [God] in heaven.

### **The Law and the Prophets**

17 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil. <sup>18</sup>For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. <sup>19</sup>Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>20</sup>For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

## SERMON

### "Salt and Light"

1. Nothing like a good-ol' power outage to make us realize just how much we depend on electricity
  - a. Late last year Tracy and I hosted a church committee retreat on a Saturday morning at our house
    - i. I woke up before the alarm went off, only to realize that the alarm was not on
    - ii. We had lost power overnight.

- iii. It was still really dark out and we now we had no way to make the breakfast casserole we had planned to make for the retreat
    - iv. It would eventually be light enough for us to meet in our living room and have our meeting, but it would still be dark out when people were arriving at the house, so we needed to line the sidewalk to the house with luminaries
    - v. Tracy likes candles, so we had plenty of candle power all over the house.
    - vi. The candles not only lit the house enough, but it gave it a cozy feel
  - b. That outage brought to mind a trip I took to Kenya, when I stayed overnight with my friend Pastor George (I've talked about him to you before)
    - i. He and his wife Doris have a humble home in a lush rural area in Kenya, not too far from Mount Kenya
    - ii. Their 2 bedroom home had indoor plumbing, but not electricity
    - iii. When I stayed with them, the daughter graciously gave up her bedroom, and so I got settled there
    - iv. As night fell, out came a couple of kerosene lamps. One was for the living room / dining room where I sat and chatted with the family, and the second lamp was assigned to me for my little bedroom.
    - v. In pitch darkness, it is amazing how much light a single lamp casts
    - vi. It took some getting used to for me, because I am just accustomed to having more light even at night, but it eventually becomes something you accept
    - vii. And that one lamp, strategically placed, was really all we needed. And we needed it for sure
  - c. In the way we live our lives in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century American city, we don't think about light until it's not there at our beck and call.
    - i. We end up taking it for granted that when we walk into a room in my house, all we have to do is flip a switch and light will immediately be available
- 2. There was no way to take light for granted in the time of Jesus
  - a. I think about my friends George and Doris in Kenya, and how the cycle of the work day (taking care of the cow and chickens, the garden etc.) was more organic
  - b. The presence and absence of light at night was more noticeable
    - i. Outside, then, they relied on a bright moon a great deal
    - ii. And inside they turned to simple oil lamps to light their homes
    - iii. And, like Jesus says in today's Gospel passage, when you had your lamp lit in a darkened room you placed that lamp in a strategic place, so it could illuminate the entire room, often that meant illuminating the entire HOUSE since it could well have been a very small dwelling
    - iv. The household depended on the light that lamp gave off, and they probably had a limited number lamps and limited supply of oil to fuel them
  - c. And as with light, salt was not something to be taken for granted
    - i. In ancient times, salt played a crucial role in preserving food, keeping food from spoiling, like when salting and drying fish for example
    - ii. Salt is common and inexpensive for us today, but in Jesus' time, salt was harder to obtain and therefore definitely expensive
    - iii. Special salt rations were given to Roman soldiers as part of their pay (the word "salary" comes from the Latin word for salt) <http://www.aplainaccount.org/epiphany-5a-gospel>
    - iv. And with salt, a little went a long way

- d. It is important for us to get in the mindset of what salt and light meant for the original audience, because when Jesus is telling the disciples they're salt and light, it is a huge deal
  - i. Jesus is paying his disciples a compliment
  - ii. Salt and light played an important role in life, and people depended on them
  - iii. So it is with you, Jesus says to his followers: how you live out these teachings will play a crucial role in the life of the community
    1. Your compassion will let others see God love for us
    2. Your forgiveness will show how God is merciful
    3. Your faith will shed light on how God guides us
3. As we spend these few Sundays thinking about the Sermon on the mount, we are reminded that we have a key role to play in our community as salt and light
  - a. Following Jesus is neither a passive nor a private endeavor, but instead an active and public one
  - b. What's more, Jesus is saying that the community needs the light we bring, the example we offer
    - i. It may be an imperfect light which flickers and may face the threat of gusts of wind
    - ii. But it is a light which allows us to see God at work around us, which lets people see that Jesus is the reason we fight hard for justice and work hard to care for those in need
    - iii. Maybe some have taken the work of the church for granted, or have given the church up for dead, but that is far from the truth
    - iv. Like a single oil lamp in a pitch-dark room, we have an outsized impact with our faithful work
    - v. Like the few grains of salt season a whole bowl of soup, so does our heart for justice and peace flavor the conversation in our community when we face challenges
4. Salt and light cannot be taken for granted, nor can their impact be underestimated. That's you. That's all of us. The community is looking to us in the churches (depend on us!) to be a courageous living example of what Jesus taught us. We uphold the peacemaker and the one who mourns, and we lead in the community with the meek and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Shine and let people give glory to God by seeing how we live out our faith!