

26/7/20 **Community Matters** (Isaiah 58:6-14, Matthew 5: 13-16, Matthew 26:16-20)

As we wait for permissions to resume worship in the church buildings, albeit initially on a very restricted basis, and to a “return to normal church life”, we need to hear God’s warning to the Jewish religious establishment in Isaiah 58.

“I’m not going to listen to your prayers and your fine worship unless you put your faith into practice -and that includes reaching out to care for the hungry and homeless, trying to share our God-given riches; practise fairness and injustice, respond to the needs of our neighbours; and do away with the pointing finger and malicious talk; then you will find your joy in the Lord.

Covid-19 has had shattering effects on our community. Schools and business were shut. Healthcare provision has been disrupted and treatment delayed. Our freedom to meet has been curtailed. Headlines warn of worsening food poverty, mental health, domestic violence, job losses and family breakdown. The economy faces immense uncertainties and strains. Responding to urgent demands with limited resources has led to new priorities and now some are better placed than others to go forward out of lockdown. In the first 3 months, most in the local community in Shotts, Allanton & Hartwood were in it together and often looking out for the most vulnerable and each other but now, divisions and differing prospects are likely to increase over coming months.

Our readings make clear that Community matters to God. Community matters for the church. Community - and each person too.

Christ is **good news** for our neighbours, the communities we are part of and for the world. The **good news** of the reality of the love and truth of all that God has done and revealed in Jesus; that God in Jesus came to be part of our world and offers God’s life and love to all who turn to Him. **Good news that the local church is called to share as salt and light.** But what is the **good news** of Jesus for the single parent struggling to cope? For the shielded and isolated? For those living in food poverty? For those whose job or livelihood seems to have been lost? What is the **good news** of Jesus for those living without disability support? For children in the care system? For asylum seekers and refugees? The first 3 chapters of Genesis are pictures that reveal the truth behind our broken lives, world and communities. God’s beautiful sustainable creation should be kept and cared for by human creatures in the presence and loving rule of the creator king. All is made to be “*very good*”, human life flourishing - life as it should be in God’s good design. But human sin and selfishness, wanting to be always in control and to do our own thing upsets and spoils our world, as humanity fails to relate to God, to each other and to Creation in a way that is “*very good.*”

But as Christians, however, we are to live as people of hope and promise as we wait for life as it will be –when the work of Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascended reign are brought to completion in the new recreated heaven and earth. When the Creator will once again fully dwell with His re-imaged creatures, in a renewed, redeemed creation and community restored. The human experiences of mourning, hunger, thirst, death, disease, pain & injustice. now such a big part of the life of our communities, will be no more

(Revelation 7: 15-15; 21: 1-4) We, the Church, should live within our communities as “good news people”.

Throughout the bible, God’s people are placed in places or situations with a purpose. Abraham and his descendants were to be *a light* pointing to God’s grace. Even in exile, God’s people were called to seek the “*shalom*”, peace, healing and good of the people and place they now inhabited (Jeremiah 29:7). Jesus moved from village to town to city, preaching in the synagogues, teaching; sharing dinner tables and picnics, chatting at wells, bringing good news, whole life transformation to marginalised roadside beggars, rejected women and men, and to sinful tax collectors and prostitutes.

What about us? Are we *salt* and *light* for our communities?

Jesus did not leave a set of truths that require mere intellectual approval but left behind a community of followers who were to believe and live out the good news – who would go, teach and invite others to likewise believe, follow and learn. In the meantime, we are commissioned to live as God’s people in our local communities as *Christ’s ambassadors* filled with His Spirit and enabled by His power to witness in word and deed to God’s love and life as it could be now, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Not so much “Tell me” as “Show me” for our neighbours.

Let us go forward - in Christ, and enabled by in Christ’s grace.

(Matthew 5: 13-17) *Worth its Salt?*

Before we had freezers, they salted ham or beef to preserve it.

I cut my foot on the beach & they sent me straight into the stinging sea
because it cleans and heals, they said.

Despite its bad press recently, cooks still use salt to bring out the taste
or things would be insipid

A church that's worth its salt has truths to preserve
but only what's worth keeping.

I dreaded moving to a smaller house, so many books & furniture wouldn't fit
I had to decide what really matters & what to keep.

A church that's worth its salt does not cart junk around
nor is it so cluttered that it cannot move.

A church that's worth its salt
makes time & place for prayer & bible study to reconnect with God
& makes time & place for healing,
& works for reconciliation, wholeness, healing
within a church & between the churches, in families & in community,
within this nation and in the world.

A church that's worth its salt enriches people's lives;

So many want their life to be worth living,
chase happiness in the wrong directions,
& have false expectations of themselves or others or life itself.

A church that's worth its salt knows where it stands,
and stands there -

knows where it stands, not on trivia
but on really important issues,
the things people lie awake worrying about.

Being light to the world
means helping people to see more clearly.

And as the only light we have is His,
Who is Himself the Light of the World;
we have to reflect Him.

R.S.V.P.