

## Worship at home

March 7, 2021

*Third Sunday in Lent*



<http://www.haliburtonanglican.org/home/2017/9/2/salt-and-light-compelling-words-from-the-late-rev-john-stott>

### **Call to worship:**

Surely, he has borne our infirmities  
and carried our diseases;  
yet we accounted him stricken,  
struck down by God, and afflicted.  
But he was wounded for our transgressions,  
crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the punishment that made us whole,  
and by his bruises we are healed.<sup>1</sup>

### **Prayers of praise, confession, and assurance:<sup>2</sup>**

Almighty God,  
you have set the whirling cosmos in motion  
and called all creatures into being.  
All that exists speaks of your majesty,  
yet no detail misses your care and attention.  
You know each of us by name,  
and make yourself known to those who seek you.  
Your wisdom delights the human heart and purifies the soul.  
We gather to enjoy your presence with us,  
and to listen for your Word for our times and our lives.  
God, our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer,  
to you alone all worship, honour and glory are due,  
this day and every day, now and always.

God of mercy:

You call us to be thankful  
for your good gifts to us,

---

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 52: 13; 53:4-6, 12b.

<sup>2</sup> adapted from worship resource for March 7, 2021 available at <https://presbyterian.ca/worship>

but too often we have taken them for granted,  
presuming our greatness, we treat them as though we deserve them.

You call us to be hopeful  
through the gospel of Jesus Christ,  
but too often despair comes upon us,  
the cares and need of the world,  
of our families,  
of ourselves  
weigh us down.

You call us to be joyful  
in the wonder of your presence among us,  
but too often we become mired in the mundane,  
overwhelmed by persistent sin,  
and lose the gift of reverence.

By your saving power, O God,  
enable us to celebrate your love for us  
with joy and with thanksgiving.

For the sake of Christ and his gospel,  
amen.

### **Assurance of Pardon**

The apostle Paul declared that the message of the Cross is foolishness to many, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. By this power, we are forgiven. Thanks be to God for the wisdom to live as forgiven people.

**Hymn #202** “We lay our broken world in sorrow at your feet”  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzWn1Uva-6U>

### **God’s Word read and interpreted:**

MARK 9:30-50.

### Embracing the Necessary Season: Salt and Sacrifice

Jesus and his disciples had been in Caesarea Philippi. They now began journeying south towards their eventual destination: Jerusalem in the province of Judea, outside of which Jesus will be arrested and crucified as the sacrifice by which salvation is affected. Their journey south took them through his home province of Galilee. Previously, the public need in Galilee had been so intense they were hardly able to eat and sleep. Evidently, the situation hadn't changed because we're told he didn't want anyone to know he was there. There were some things he needed his disciples to understand before they arrived in Jerusalem! Consequently, as he walked, he sought anonymity and found rest in private houses so that he could be alone with his disciples.

We've already encountered the content of his lesson in chapter 8:31. This was immediately after Peter confessed Jesus to be the Messiah. And, immediately before Peter rejected the terms of Jesus' messiahship!

Here we read Jesus' second attempt to make his message understood:

“The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands,  
and they will kill him,  
and three days after being killed, he will rise again.”<sup>3</sup>

If this statement makes you feel uncomfortable, you are not alone. There are many people, within the church as well as without, who find these words and the implications thereof, offensive. There is, packed into this sentence, as well as in 8:31 and again in 10:33-34 (which we'll discuss in two weeks) violence. Personal rejection and betrayal. Physical torture. And, a brutal death, which was fully sanctioned by both the religious and the civic powers. This is not the means to salvation that most of us want. And, it is not a means to salvation that is readily understood. The suffering and death of one man for the salvation of many? So, if this statement makes you confused, offended, or uncomfortable, you are not alone. “[The disciples] did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.”<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Mark 9:31.

<sup>4</sup> Mark 9:32.

The temptation is then to live in Christmas and Easter and ignore the central terms of Jesus' messiahship. This is what Peter was trying to do when he rebuked Jesus in 8:32. Let's skip ahead to the Resurrection. Better yet, let's skip ahead to Jesus' return and the wedding feast of heaven and earth!

But, of course, that is not reality.

Reality is the joy of a birth and the pain of a death.

It is the beauty of harmony between people and the suffering of a broken relationship.

It is the kindness of a helping hand and the evil of a raised hand.

Every year during the season of Lent, we are reminded that this is precisely where we live. That the kingdom of God has come near, and yet it is still to be perfected; that the Living God became incarnate in Jesus who has been resurrected, yet he is still to come again; that the Father has redeemed his world, yet it is still broken by the effects of sin.

In the privacy of their Capernaum home, Jesus attempted to purify the disciples' ways and means while clarifying the ways and means of the kingdom of God and the terms of his messiahship.

Jesus spoke of welcoming the vulnerable and innocent in his name; of effecting real and positive action in Jesus' name (regardless of communal affiliations!); of doing a kindness in Jesus' name. He spoke as well of the necessary cost to our egos, pride, and desire for pleasure. All for the sake of Christ and his gospel.

And, as a conclusion to his lesson, he evoked (and not for the first time) the image of salt. There can be multiple interpretations. Salt is a preservative. Salt is fertilizer. However, Jesus is Jewish. The roots of Christian discipleship are the covenants Yahweh made with the patriarchs, as well as the offerings and sacrifices made as the Israelites journeyed in the wilderness and later settled around the temple in Jerusalem. It's true Jesus challenged many unexamined embedded traditions and systems, and overthrew many of them. Yet, Gentiles are able to claim the inheritance with Christ only by the Father's grace in adopting us in Jesus' name into this ancient and covenanted family.

To that end, it's instructive to consider salt from another perspective.

Together with the grain and drink offerings made at the temple, worshippers would offer salt. The offerings were symbolic meals shared between humanity and God. They were friendship meals. They symbolized the partnership between Yahweh and people. There are a variety of interpretations as to why salt was offered with the grain, however, one seems plausible and consistent with the religious practices of other Mediterranean groups. Simply put, salt enhances the flavour of the bread and thus the enjoyment of the meal for both Yahweh and worshipper. God enjoys a bit of salt with his bread! (Anyone who has dipped a bit of bread in olive oil and salt with a glass of red wine on the side understands the appeal!)

“Everyone will be salted with fire.” And, some manuscripts add: “and every sacrifice will be salted with salt.”

Notice that it is the people, who will be salted; who will have salt poured over them.

Taken with the imagery of the covenant offerings and Jesus' words at the beginning of the lesson which point to his offering himself as sacrifice, the meaning becomes that the disciples will share with Jesus in being the sacrifice by which salvation is affected. Albeit, in a much lesser imitation of his sacrificial grace. The means of such sacrifice; the salt shaker of discipleship, is the fire of trial for the sake of Christ and his gospel; of relinquishing your pride of place, your self-importance. It is paying the cost to one's ego of putting others first and placing the self in the role of servant of all. It is paying the cost of ruthlessly giving up those parts of one's life that trap us in the darkness and prevent us from encouraging others in the light of the kingdom of God.

What's interesting about salt is that it cannot lose its saltiness. Salt is a compound. For salt to lose its saltiness – its taste, its colour, its preservative qualities, the constituent elements would have to be separated. If that happened, it would not be salt. NaCl is salty. Na and Cl are not.

However, salt can be diluted. Saturated with water or impurities, the saltiness of the compound becomes less noticeable. Likewise, when we live in the reality between Christmas and the Second Coming, we can become so diluted by cares and need, and so

mired in the mundane and the sinful that our ability to reflect Christ's light becomes barely noticeable.

Which causes me to wonder if Jesus was speaking in descriptive rather than purely prescriptive terms. It's been my observation that many followers of Jesus do live these ways and means in various degrees. And, sometimes to the point of burn out. Donor fatigue is a nearly measurable syndrome. People generally recognize the incredible need and want to give all they can. But the need is so great! Resources become stretched. Next to donor fatigue is volunteer burn-out. We know there's much work to be done, but sometimes it's all we can do to get through the day without losing our cool or making snide comments about others who are themselves embodying the kingdom as best they are able.

When Jesus was betrayed by his own disciple, arrested, when his nearest friend rejected him, when he was beaten and humiliated, he suffered the full extent of the darkness of which human beings are capable. Yet, he did so without violence; with passivity; with strength that comes only from the knowledge that such evil will not win.

As much as we'd rather not accept the terms of Jesus' messiahship, it is necessary. It is necessary that the Messiah engage the power of darkness for us and on our behalf. We cannot do it.

Jesus is the Messiah. By his sacrifice; his passion and crucifixion, he did for us, in our place, and on our behalf what we can never do for ourselves.

Am I willing to believe Jesus is the Messiah on his terms?

Am I willing to believe that his ways and means are good, even if they cost me my pride, my pleasures, my life?

Am I prepared to hear and abide by his words and rid myself of anything that dilutes my God-given saltiness so that I can encourage others in their faith and be at peace with others?

**Prayers:**

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

**Hymn #624 “Blest are they”**

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

(David Haas, et. all)

**Benediction:**

The Lord bless you and keep you,  
the Lord be kind and gracious to you,  
the Lord make his face shine upon you,  
and grant you peace.  
Amen.