**Salt & Light- Be Distinctive; Make a difference Matt 5:13-16**

Here’s a question for a Sunday morning to challenge the grey matter…What do sodium chloride and electromagnetic waves have in common? They both make a difference!

Sodium chloride – NaCl, salt & electromagnetic waves – light, both make a difference.

This is the point where the chemists among you jump up and say ‘ hey, its not that simple, there’s more than one type of salt, and the physicists say oi, what about other light sources?

Well, yes….

Jesus said to his followers you are the salt of the earth you are the light of the world

One preserves and adds flavour. The other provides illumination. They both make a difference.

If you’ve ever tried a jar of baby food (since you were a baby that is) you’ll know how bland it is – what it really needs is a good teaspoon of salt, or those add your own (salt and shale) crisps and you don’t add the salt.

If you’ve ever crashed around in your home during a power cut, trying to find your phone, or a torch or a candle, or if you’ve ever stood on a piece of lego in bare feet in the middle of the night on your way to the loo, you’ll know that light makes a difference.

You, we, are the salt of the earth. A positive force for good

Salt gets bad press these days. Too much of it raises our blood pressure and causes all kinds of trouble. But salt in ancient world was a valuable commodity. Roman soldiers at one time were paid in salt (where our word salary come from). It was a much needed preservative and a flavouring.

Eugene Peterson’s The Message paraphrases Jesus’ words as this:

*Let me tell you why you are here. You are here to be salt seasoning that brings out the God flavours of this earth. If you lose your saltiness how will people taste godliness? You’ve lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage.*

Jesus called his disciples, and therefore he calls us too, to add flavour to the world: to add fulfilment, taste, a zest for life. Adding something positive, not taking something away.

Adding vibrancy, celebration of all that’s good, adding value to experience and quality of life to those we come into contact with.

The Roman emperor Julien around 360 AD said ‘Have you looked at these Christians closely…dull eyed, hollow cheeked, flat breasted the lot of them’.

Within a relatively short period of time Jesus followers had lost that positive flavour.

I want people to say ‘have you looked at these Christians closely, bright-eyed, full of joy, good company, making a positive difference in our community

Once salt is mixed with something it has an effect. Preserves by drawing water out of cells so bacteria die. Mixed with food for flavour, it permeates the food, spill some and it goes everywhere, find tiny grains for ages, mix it up with your crisps and you have a right game to get rid of it. The grains do their work, influencing everything they come into contact with.

That’s our job. To work our way through, making a difference, to get in the tiny cracks, mix with other substances, draw out the water, yes sometimes be an irritant (but not simply for the sake of it!!)

And what about light? It might be electromagnetic waves, but it’s something wonderful

Eugene Peterson again:

*Here’s another way to put it. You’re here to be light, bringing out the god-colours in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light bearers you don’t think I’m going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I’m putting you on a light stand. Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop – shine!*

Light is warning, guide, visible, cannot be hidden. Jesus said in Johns gospel ‘I am the light of the world’. We reflect Jesus’ light. He is the source. We don’t produce our own light. We shine it out for him. A lighthouse, one light, lots of mirrors. As Jesus’ followers we are the mirrors.

We all have times when we struggle to add flavour; times when we want to get a bowl and put it over the light so it doesn’t shine out anymore., for all kinds of reasons. Perhaps you live with the fear of being discovered, found out that you’ve lost your saltiness, worried that you might be thrown out.

 We’re not going to be thrown out!! Jesus was making the point that Israel (God’s chosen people) had lost their distinctive taste. When we feel bland we can go back to the source, to Jesus himself.

Picture for a moment a chameleon and a peacock. A chameleon is a clever kind of lizard –it can change its colour to blend in to its environment. Whereas a peacock fans out its tail to show off the beautiful colours. We are called to be peacocks rather than chameleons, not to show off for the sake of it, but to demonstrate God’s beauty.