

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
 Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Part 1)
 You are the salt of the earth.
 Scripture: Matthew 5:1-20
 Rev. Steve Filyk
 Opening Hymn: We praise you, O God 425
 Choruses: This little light of mine, Mighty to save
 Closing Hymn: Lord, I want to be a Christian 571
 January 22, 2023

Jesus goes up on the mountainside
 And starts describing the kind of people
 That have God's favour.

He calls them 'blessed'.

So who are these people?
 And who would you call blessed?

Blessed are those whose children have launched
 And are making positive contributions to society

Blessed are those bought homes when they were affordable
 And have the cash to escape to sunny destinations each winter.

Blessed are those whose inherited good genes
 Who are cancer free and skinny.

Whatever you consider constitutes blessedness,
 none of those people,
 none of these attributes makes Jesus' list.

Who does Jesus say has God's favour?
 Here's his list:
 (I've rewritten them adding a little interpretation)

Blessed are those who are at the end of their rope
 Or people who have lost what is most dear to them:
 Those who get walked on,
 And those who pursue justice.

Blessed are those who cut others slack
 Or people who are wholehearted in devotion:
 Those who help people get along with each other,
 Those who suffer for doing what is right.ⁱ

Now what Jesus declares doesn't make a lot of sense.
 Jesus' list includes people we would consider society's losers,
 Not its winners.

You'd hardly consider someone who has lost a child
 Or has been fired for whistleblowing,
 as blessed.

So how do we make sense of this.
 As usual some context helps...
 So let's take a step back.

Last Sunday we talked about Jesus being tested in the wilderness.
 After this testing Jesus calls his first disciples
 And travels through Galilee
 teaching, preaching and healing.

The end of chapter 4 tells us that:
 "New about him spread all over Syria,
 and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases,
 those suffering severe pain,
 the demon-possessed,
 those having seizures,
 and the paralyzed;

and he healed them."ⁱⁱ

Jesus is teaching and preaching and healing.

He is getting a lot of press and is being swarmed by people in need.
 People are lining up to see him,
 Like they are lined up in the halls of Royal Inland Hospital.
 They are desperate to get a touch from a man
 Who might take their burdens away.

After spending time among these people
 Jesus leaves them and heads up the mountainside,
 where he begins to teach his disciples.

I imagine Jesus looking down that mountainside,
 at the crowds of the disabled and marginalised
 That he has left behind,
 Pointing to them and telling the disciples
 That these are the ones
 These are the ones who are blessed.

Well how is it that they are blessed?

They are blessed because they have encountered God's reign
 That is making a beachhead in Jesus.

Those who are mourning their condition
 Have been consoled.
 Those who are meek have been lifted up.
 Those who have suffered for doing what is right
 Have been vindicated.

Jesus has walked among them
 And has cared for their needs.

Even those who have yet to receive this blessing
 They are also blessed,
 because even though they are still waiting
 this reign of God has been inaugurated
 and will surely be fulfilled.

But how will it be fulfilled in a world
 that is shattered into so many pieces.
 How will this reign be extended when this embodied Jesus
 Can encounter only one person at a time.

It will happen because Jesus has enlisted apprentices, disciples,
 Who will carry on his work
 throughout the entire world.

Now just in case you think your pastor has gone off the road,
 Hear these words from Rodney Reeves,
 A professor of biblical studies at Southwest Baptist University:

“the Beatitudes picture “eschatology [final things] in the process of realization,”
 the vision of Jesus for the kingdom,
 the embodiment of God’s righteousness dawning on Israel—
 the light shining in the darkness.

And yet, for all Matthew has done to set up this moment,
 to present Jesus as the one who will make it all happen,
 here’s the shocker:
 Jesus knew he couldn’t do it by himself.

This is why he preached the Sermon;
 from the beginning Jesus intended to extend his messianic work
 through his disciples.”ⁱⁱⁱ

This is made clear in the Scripture that follows.

After Jesus pronounces blessings on the sick and wounded,
 Jesus speaks directly to his disciples telling them
 These important words:

“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.”^{iv}

I’ve already talked about the metaphor of light
 In today’s children’s message.
 But what is Jesus saying by calling us salt?

In our culture salt
 doesn’t have a lot of positive connotations...
 especially for those with high blood pressure.

But in ancient times...
 “The value of salt...
 [could not] be underestimated.

Roman soldiers received their wages in salt.
 The Greeks considered salt to be divine.
 The Mosaic Law required that all offerings
 presented by the Israelites contain salt. (Lev. 2:13)”^v

Then as now: salt was a preservative, an antiseptic, and a seasoning.
 Then as now: salt was necessary for life.

The fact is that “the human body can’t live without some sodium.
 It’s needed to transmit nerve impulses,
 contract and relax muscle fibers
 (including those in the heart and blood vessels),
 and maintain a proper fluid balance.”^{vi}

Jesus calls his disciples salt,
 A priceless commodity.

But salt’s value is in its application.
 It does no good in the salt shaker.
 It is meant to be applied.

Jesus says that we are the “salt of the earth”.
 That is salt for the earth, not for ourselves.

[To remain salty we need to guard against impurities,
We must remain true to our calling as Jesus' disciples.

While pure salt can only be pure salt (NaCl),
salt that is gathered and employed for use,
can be less than pure and therefore less effective.

"Much salt used in [Jesus' time] was taken from salt deposits
on the edge of the Dead Sea.
These deposits also included gypsum,
which looks much like salt... [except it tastes like drywall].^{vii]}

When Jesus pronounced blessing
upon the world's marginalised and broken
he did it in the understanding that his followers
would be taking up his calling
To teach, preach, AND to heal.

Much of the global church understands
Jesus ministry as multifaceted:
Teaching, preaching, AND healing.

But here in North America much of the church's efforts
In works of healing has been overtaken by the State.

As we've been displaced, we have found ourselves preaching
A diminished Gospel overlooks our bodies
Even as it addresses our souls.

But this is not what Jesus intended.

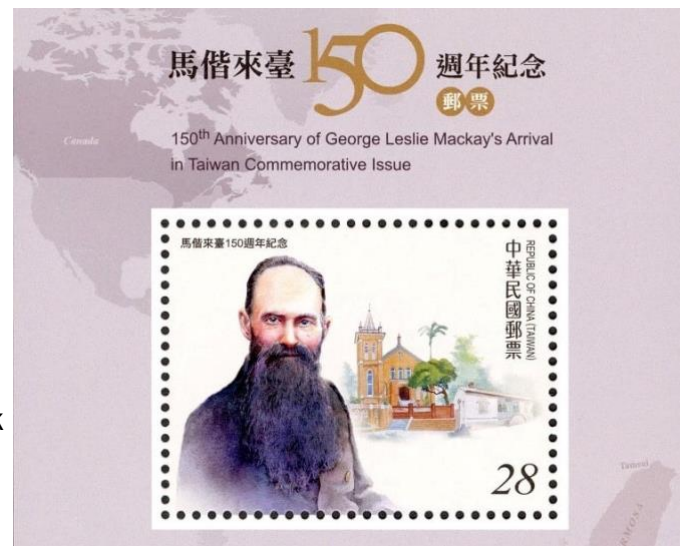
Add to this that more and more we find ourselves in a world
Where the state itself has exceeded its capacity.
It is failing at providing the kinds of healing
that people desperately need.

Could this be our opportunity to re-engage with the full Gospel work
That Jesus has called us too?

Last year marked the "150th anniversary
of Canadian missionary George Leslie Mackay's arrival in Taiwan.

Perhaps the country's most beloved 19th-century Westerner,
Mackay has been celebrated by Taiwan
through children's books, stamps, statues, paintings...
a puppet production, and [even] an opera... [show stamp on screen]

So what made this foreigner
[a Canadian Presbyterian Missionary]
worthy of this level of affection
more than 100 years after his death?"



I think it is because knew what it meant to be the salt of the world.

He got out of the salt-shaker
And applied himself liberally to the needs he saw around him,
Serving the world for Christ's sake.

"In addition to preaching and teaching,
providing medical treatment was...
an important aspect of Mackay's mission work.

This began with the missionary offering quinine to malaria patients
and extracting people's decayed teeth
in the villages he visited in his evangelizing efforts.

Often he and his students would sing a hymn to patients,
extract their teeth, and then preach the gospel to them.
Over the years, Mackay became known
for having pulled thousands of teeth."^{viii}

[Sometimes recent seminary graduates complain
That their schooling never prepared them properly for ministry.
Mackay picked up new skills
and new languages,
even a local wife,

So he could fulfill his function of being salt in Taiwanese society.]

It is amazing to think that one person
Could have such an enduring ministry.

But salt is by its nature very powerful and effective
You don't need a lot to have a big impact.

So what might a community like St. Andrew's accomplish
If we continued Jesus' ministry of teaching, preaching,
AND healing?

May God show us. Amen.

ⁱ Some of my own interpretation is going on here especially through the lens of Peterson's *The Message*.

ⁱⁱ Matthew 4:24-25 NIV

ⁱⁱⁱ Reeves, Rodney. Matthew: 1 (The Story of God Bible Commentary) (p. 103). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.

^{iv} Matthew 5:13-16 NIV

^v Youssef, Michael. "Christian: You Are Salt and Light." Christianity, 8 Sept. 2022, www.christianity.com/bible/christian-you-are-salt-and-light-11596480.html.

^{vi} "Take it with a grain of salt - Harvard Health." Harvard Health, 1 Nov. 2006, www.health.harvard.edu/heart-health/take-it-with-a-grain-of-salt.

^{vii} Ronald J. Allen Matthew 5:13-20 *The Lectionary Commentary: the Gospels*

^{viii} Seitz, Hong-Hsin Lin with Jonathan. "Why Taiwan Loves This Canadian Missionary Dentist." ChristianityToday, 25 July 2022, www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2022/july-web-only/george-leslie-mackay-taiwan-missionary-canada.html.