



Matthew 5: 13-16 St. David's Day at St. David's, Delta March 5, 2017

"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 underfoot.

"You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. 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. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

It's hard when things that you intend to go one way don't turn out the way you had hoped. It's hard to be stopped along the path you thought you were going and having to go a way you had not expected. It's hard to live in and through difficult times.

You may think I'm talking about some of what has gone at St. David's of late or what has gone on between me as your bishop and this parish. But honestly I'm not. No, instead I'm describing what it must have been like to be a monk in one of monasteries founded and led by David of Wales, this parish's patron saint.

David of Wales was, of course, a Bishop, renowned for his teaching and preaching. He also founded a number of monasteries, and as a part of doing this, established the pattern of life those monks would follow day in and day out. The particular pattern that David chose was very, very difficult. This difficulty began even before a person entered one of David's monasteries. Anyone wishing to join were to wait outside for ten days, "during which time the person was tested--by "harsh words, repeated refusals, and painful labours." This, of course, was just a sample of what was to come once

a person was accepted into the monastery. For once they were admitted monks typically laboured in the fields without benefit of any farm animals to make their work easier, were only given bread, vegetables and salt, water and a little milk at their once-a-day evening meal, and were expected to pray for three hours before going to bed each night, waking up the next day at dawn for more prayer.

And so David's formational philosophy, it seems, went something like this—difficult conditions are a kind of crucible for the Christian life, a kind of testing ground in which a monk gets to discover who he is, how he behaves, and what the quality of his relationship to God and to others was really all about.

The context of our Gospel reading for today, the one the Church assigns for the Feast of St. David, suggests much the same thing. That passage, in which Jesus talks about being salt and light, is a part of the beatitudes in Matthew's Gospel. In Matthew, these Beatitudes are addressed not to the crowd but to the disciples alone, the little group of insiders who pledged to follow Jesus through the ups and downs he, himself would experience. Right before this passage Jesus warns the disciples that they will undergo great difficulty as they attempt to live out the Gospel in a culture and an environment that will not necessarily accept it or them.

And then right in the middle of talk of all that difficulty, Jesus says the words we hear today: "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 underfoot.

"You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. 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. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

In other words, despite all your difficulty, in the middle of all your difficulty, you have a potential and a purpose that is given to you by God and that cannot be taken away. You are salt, and so be salt and nothing less. You are light, and so position yourself on a lampstand where all can see you and be light for us all.

You are salt, that is, within difficult circumstances, you have the potential to claim your challenging, justice-seeking voice. And you are light, that is, you have the ability not just to see but to speak about what is really going on in an insightful, compassionate and truthful way. These are the two ways of being, the two kinds of ways of acting that Jesus tells the disciples that they are capable of as they face the difficulties ahead.

And so today—where in your own life are you being called to be salt? To be the one who sees and speaks out about the worth and dignity of those others may see as worthless or expendable? Where in your family, in your community, in your civic life are you needed as salt? Likewise where in your life are you called to be light? Are you called to get in touch with and then to speak to what is really going on in a way that expresses God's compassion? Where might this light be needed from you in your family, in your community or in your civic life?

And, of course, today, on the patronal feast of this parish, we have to ask ourselves where salt and light are needed from us in the life of this parish.

I know that it has not been easy of late to be at St. David's—first with Paul's departure, then with the attempt to do the work of interim ministry here and now with the appointment of a new priest-in-charge here. I know there are a lot of questions that many of you have about how this will work and what effect it will have on the parish. And, of course, we'll have a chance to talk through much of this at the Vestry meeting after our liturgy today.

But what I would like to say is this: While all of this has been difficult and trying for us all, this may just be the time that we, you and I, get to enact the very God-given identity that is ours, to be salt for one another, which within the parish means advocating for those not usually heard from, those who would typically be left out of the decisions and activity. This may just be the time that we, you and I, are to be light for one another, that is, concentrating on and speaking to what we believe is really going on and doing so with the compassion that God would have for the situation.

For God has entrusted these ministries, these very capabilities to us—to us—as gifts we are to give to one another not during easy times but under the conditions of difficulty, when corners can be turned, when saints can be emulated and when life can be transformed.

And so today, people of St. David's, be the salt that you can be to one another. Be the light that you can be to one another, not in secret but out on a lampstand for all to see. Your God needs this of you. This community needs this of you. And, yes, I your bishop need this of you.