

This morning we hear two strong voices speaking together. One is Isaiah, calling out to a people who know their religious routines well. The other is Jesus, speaking to ordinary people on a hillside, people trying to live faithfully in a complicated world.

Both Isaiah & Jesus are asking the same question: *What does real faith look like when it shows itself in daily life?*

Isaiah begins with blunt honesty. The people fast, they pray, they show up for worship: they're doing all the religious things on their checklists, but they are still missing the mark. God says, in effect, "You are hungry, but you are not feeding the hungry. You bow your heads in prayer, but you turn away from your neighbour." Isaiah uses very concrete images of faith in action: bread shared with the hungry, the homeless brought into our houses, clothing given to someone who is cold. Faith is not vague: it is as practical as a loaf of bread & as close as the person in front of you.

In the Gospel, Jesus says, "You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world." Again, very concrete ideas. Salt is a staple of life, something that both preserves &

transforms the ordinary into something greater. Light reveals what is true & good — what truly matters.

But salt & light are only themselves when they are brought out & put to use. Salt that stays in the shaker is of no use, & a lamp hidden under a basket defeats its purpose. So, you see, Jesus is not praising his listeners: he's giving them a calling. *This is what your life is meant to do. To show forth God's love — the love by which God transforms this world to reflect his image & glory.*

Our calling is both comforting & challenging. Comforting, because it reminds us that faith is not about being perfect but simply about showing up, again & again, contributing as able to the building up of the whole. But it is challenging because God is calling us to look honestly at whether faith is *alive* in us, or if we are rather keeping faith contained — safe, familiar, & private.

Isaiah speaks to people who are serious about religion but tempted to separate it from the rest of life, while Jesus speaks to people who are just beginning to understand what following him will mean. Both insist that faith always moves outward, spilling over to the greater good. It's an important message as we approach Lent.

Isaiah says that when God's people loose the bonds of injustice, when they stop pointing fingers & speaking ill, when they care for the poor & the afflicted, *then* light breaks forth like the dawn. Notice the order. The light does not come first as a reward. It emerges along the way, as people walk in obedience. Healing, guidance, strength — these come not from trying harder to be religious, but from living out our faith in ordinary life, bringing hope & love to places where people are hurting.

For those of us in later seasons of life, this matters deeply. Some of us no longer have the energy we once had. Our circles are smaller than they once were. Our roles have changed. But salt is salt, & light does not have to be blinding to serve a vital purpose. A steady presence, a patient listening ear, a willingness to notice who is being overlooked: these are just a few examples of what it means to be salt & light — & these simple actions can have incredible power. Go find someone in need, “reach out & touch faith,” as Johnny Cash sings.

As Lent approaches, we often think about what we might give up. For Isaiah, it's both *What might we give up* & also *What might we give ourselves to?*

Where is God inviting us to loosen our grip — on comforts, on judgements, on habits that keep faith in little boxes?

How can we share what we have? That sharing may look like time, or attention, or kindness, or advocacy, or simply refusing to turn away.

Jesus tells us that our good works give glory not to us, but to God. That is important. This is not about proving anything or earning God's approval. It is about letting God's life move through ours, imperfect as we are. That experience is enriching in itself to justify doing it.

So hear the good news this morning. You are already salt & light — not because you have it all together, but because God has chosen to work through you. And so, as we draw closer to Lent, may our eyes be opened wide, ready to notice where light is needed, & trusting that even small acts of faithfulness can help someone see the way forward. Amen.