

St Edmundsbury Cathedral



Salt and Light? Lamp under a bushel?

05 02 2023

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Sermon by the Reverend Sarah Geileskey, Assistant Priest

Isaiah 58.1-9a [9b-12]

1 Cor 2.1-12 [13-end]

Matthew 5.13-20

In the name of the one who is Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Amen.

“I’ve never been to a wedding like it...” said yesterday’s wedding photographer. A beautiful wedding... perhaps it was the singing... or the readings. The deep joy in seeing an abundance of love, of generosity... of the giving of self to the other. Making room for one another. Commitment until death. The gathering of family and friends – some fully known to one another, some known only in part... soon to be better known, fully known. Perhaps it was the establishment: family... of commitment to a wider community: diversity – of age and experience, different cultures and nationalities, adopted, born into, contracted into – legally so, in the case of some ‘already marrieds’ who were there... and not just for today... but for all time... the light of candles reminding us of those who have gone before but who remain with us. “I’ve never been to a wedding like it...” was it the keeping of traditions... tying the knot, speeches and toasts: a silly song and a first dance?

It's not that long since we heard in Epiphany season the story of the Wedding in Cana... a similarly joyfully abundant, life-giving occasion. The wedding I attended yesterday was certainly that.... it was (and on the eve of General Synod I make no apologies for the subtweet), it was... a really ‘exclusive-do’: not just a wedding, but a marriage between a man and a woman. In a church. Holy Matrimony. Conducted by one of those ‘women-priests’.

Why do we **fast, but you do not see?** We heard in our first reading. Why **humble** ourselves, **but you do not notice?** Both the photographer in this week’s reflection saw... and the wedding photographer yesterday noticed glimpse of ‘the other’: the invisible God, who is love, made visible in the joining together of two lives. Two people drawn to that ancient call to live in community together: the covenant pattern of relationship that makes love, bears pain and gives life.

Amongst yesterday’s many deeply meaningful wedding traditions... we could have witnessed the making of a ‘covenant of salt’¹: each pouring their own store of salt into a single receptacle: lives becoming intertwined and inseparable: blended, together... forever, given the impossibility of retrieving your own grains. Sometimes the saltiness is tasted, a little salt placed in each other’s mouth. A little too salty for some?

¹ 2 Chronicles 13.5: the kingship of Israel given to David and his descendants for ever by a covenant of salt

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'You are the salt of the earth' salt... precious and rare, a way of preventing frostiness, to bring out the best flavour, to preserve and prevent rot from setting in. Salt is at its most effective in its work when combined with other elements: salt, a metaphor that speaks of a communal reality.

'There is bread and salt between us': is the title of a page on the UN Peacekeeping website that recognises ancient middle eastern customs: the act of breaking bread, of eating together, hospitality shared and received that cements community.

'You are the light of the world' As a metaphor, light, too, speaks to community and relationship. Kept separate, kept apart, light serves little function. When light is at its most effective, it emerges within a poorly illuminated environment to brighten and reveal that which already exists, so that it may be perceived by others... seen... noticed... as the photographer sees and captures truth.

You are salt... you are light... these are statements that Jesus makes. Descriptions of you. They speak of what you already are. **'Let your light so shine before others'**... it says in the Gospel reading... please, may we not make the mistake of thinking that we are the keepers of the light. Guardians that seek to control and manage the light... this instruction is not to us... let Your light shine is a command to the light itself... it is the fulfilment of the ancient way... we seek not to abolish, but to fulfil. To see abundance of joy and hope, of justice and peace for all.

And this we will see only in relationship. In relationship with God. In relationship with humanity. In relationship with friend and stranger. Echoing the first reading: relationships that have and will often ask abstinence and require humility.

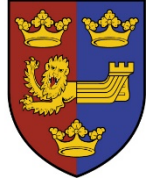
The pattern of marriage: for better or for worse, in sickness and in health, 'til death us do part. There are times in life... whether we are single, married, partnered, divorced, separated, widowed... when we will be tempted to sift through that salt and to separate our grains of sands from others with whom we 'do life' together: friends, neighbours, family, colleagues, enemies. There will be times when we may want to take the light, and hide it, under our own bushel. Times when we might hear ourselves say, suit yourself... or... that's up to you, it doesn't affect me.

You... me... I... is not the pattern of life in all its fullness.

A joining together: that we might become greater than the sum of our parts.

Love maker, pain bearer, life giver. Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the divine dance together that is community. As salt... as light... we are the community, the communion of God in the world today... and... through us... despite us... the light will shine on good works, revealing all the heavenly glory.

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To be in the room is important: that's why we find ourselves gathered here today, as were the many who had gathered from different walks and ways of life to hear Jesus' preach the Sermon on the Mount, the words which immediately precede today's Gospel reading.

In this room 'there is bread and salt between us'.

We are salt. We are light.

Shine, Light, shine.

Amen.