**Talk – Salt and Light**

Paul has been to Corinth. He is writing to the Corinthians about him coming again. He doesn’t consider that he made a good job of getting his message across to the city. (I read the subtext that he stuffed it up the first time.)

**Corinth** is now in what we call Greece. It was then a Greek city through and through. A great trading place because of its location. **It was situated on a narrow bit of land** that was between a large peninsula and the rest of Europe. – The Peloponnesian Peninsula. It was often easier to unload your goods and cart them on land than to sail around. In fact, much later, a canal was dug to take ships the short way.

Not only was it a great trading town, but being Greek through and through it was a great centre of learning and philosophy. No wonder Paul talks about “weakness and fear and trembling”. It would be like us going along to give lessons at Oxford, Cambridge in England or Harvard in Boston, USA.

But his courage and message did not rely on the complicated philosophy of the Greeks or little used technical long words. His message was simple.

***For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.***

I think we even treat that as complicated. We could have shelves of books, days of sermons, weeks of YouTube lessons and endless discussions on what this means. (and there are honestly are that many). But let’s distil it down to the simple spiritual message. Paul says that it is basically spiritual and that we need to understand it that way.

Paul says we have, in his words, “the mind of Christ”.

Here’s a challenge for me to put the gospel into one or two sentences. I would say knowing Jesus (‘Christ’ in Greek) would be to point to worship of the Father God. Jesus did not come so that we could copy him. Jesus pointed out that **Christians are primarily God-seekers, not Jesus-imitators.** That God-seeking and knowing is made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

Back to “the mind of Christ”. Maybe the Matthew passage can assist us here to make the message of the Gospel simple and understand more about the mind of Christ.

The Bible study group of Wednesdays has started to grapple with the meaning of The Beatitudes in Matthew chapter 5. This week’s reading follows on immediately from the Beatitudes.
You will know them. They start with ‘Blessed are …’. Verses 13 to 20 of Matthew 5 might help us understand ‘The Mind of Christ’. This part of the gospels is called the *Sermon on the Mount* and is regarded as, not only one of the great speeches of the world, ever, but pivotal in understanding Jesus’ message along with The Lord’s Prayer and the Golden Rule and his discussions with his disciples around the time of the Last Supper. You could probably name more of his most important statements.

**Let’s read it now.**

Immediately after the Beatitudes which are about God’s priorities in the world, in today’s reading come the words. “You are the salt of the earth”. One good thing about having to prepare for a talk like this is you have to force yourself to make sense of things that seem hard to understand at first. One important connection I found was that in the Pentateuch, the first 5 books of the Bible, with hundreds of laws in it, is this one. Every Hebrew person would know it, not just from their reading or listening but from their actions.

**You shall season your every offering of meal with salt; you shall not omit from your meal offering the salt of your covenant with God; with all your offerings you must offer salt.**

We hear salt and think of preservation or flavouring. And, of course, salt can lose its flavour by being overwhelmed by other flavours. But to the people listening to Jesus would think of it as an essential part of your offering to God. If you are the ‘salt’, it’s now simple, you are an essential part of the worship of the one true God and Jesus is stressing the point that you must keep being that. Your light, another metaphor, must keep shining and don’t be shy about it.

Jesus is not bringing in new laws to replace the old but directing us to God by showing us that attitudinal change is the most important and not just a blind keeping of the Mosaic law (which no one could do anyway).

How do we interpret his message of **being salt and light** is contained in the next verses (21 -37 of Matthew chapter 5. Now I’m understanding how the Sermon on the Mount made it into the top 100. This is expanded on with statements which you probably know but are the next few verses, and the topic of next week’s readings. They mostly start with “You have heard it said” … and have “but I say” (meaning God wants a new attitude). The topics were murder – Jesus expands on this and condemns hating. An eye for an eye becomes the powerful act of turning the other cheek. The law condemned adultery. Jesus takes it to its origin and says ‘watch out for lust’. More next week.

Paul points out how stupid it seems to those not of the Spirit. That Jesus showed that brokenness can be strength. That submission can be powerful. It’s in weakness and dependence that we are strong and that at the heart of all of this is that love can be greatness.

Pam and I were taking with her brother, Sam, over from NZ last week

Jesus actually did nothing more, but also nothing less, than manifest the primacy of God in one’s life. He demonstrated the truth and order encapsulated by all commandments, including the Ten Commandments: first recognise God, worship God and only God, and all the rest comes along with it. He summarised it as the two great commandments.

**"'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."** Matt. 22:34-40