

Being Salt and Light: The Year of Growth

5 February 2023

Reading: Matthew 5:13-20

Open our hearts and minds, O God, to your message of love.
In Jesus name we ask it. Amen

I used to do a kids' talk with salted and unsalted peanuts. In one dish were unsalted and in the other salted peanuts. I would blindfold successive children who would then taste and identify the difference salt made. The last time I was going to give this talk was at Cathedral Grammar School. Just before the service started, I was in the staff kitchen and happened to read a notice on the notice board about children with special dietary needs. The most common allergy and, for some, the deadliest was the allergy to nuts. I wanted the talk to be memorable, just not so memorable that the ambulance came!

The point of my talk and the point Jesus is making in our Gospel is the huge difference salt makes, and light makes, and he hopes we Christians also make. We are to be salt and light in the community.

This lines up with my experience. For the smallness of our number, it's amazing the difference Christians make to our community. Schools, hospitals, service clubs, sports clubs, and even our social welfare system have all been started and maintained by Christians. We don't have a monopoly on good works but we do punch above our weight.

Salt and light. They are just small things, yet they make a big difference.

If Jesus was speaking directly to us today rather than through the words of Scripture he might have used the image of uranium. A tiny thing it is and, in fact, it was a New Zealander who discovered how a piece of uranium smaller than the naked eye can see, can give off more energy than we can imagine.

Last Sunday a number of us gathered for our Mission Action Plan. You could call it our salt and light action plan. The diocese has a mission action plan and every parish is being encouraged to have one too. Archdeacon Mark came and led us through the process. Before lunch he gave an overview of church history and how we find ourselves today in a situation very similar to that of the apostolic church. As in the first three centuries of the Christian era, we find ourselves again in the minority (in the west anyway) but we are still able to make a huge difference for good. Like salt and light. After lovely asparagus rolls for lunch we looked at the areas we wanted to focus on this year. I want to bring you all up to speed on what's being planned.

There are four areas. Firstly we want to grow in our digital community. It's helpful to remember where it all started and where we have got to. In the very first Covid lockdown, three of us – Ethan, Rosemary and I, offered worship online. Ethan in his own bubble and simply with his cell phone recorded a service and sent it out. Once Covid lockdowns

stopped, we had a congregation of people who didn't want the live streaming to stop. So Ethan with a team of wonderful volunteers has continued, such that our Christmas midnight mass had over 387 screens watching it. In other words more than twice the number watching as physically present. So our plan is to give St Peter's even better exposure online. We will be crafting videos and posting them in a way where more people and younger people will stumble on them.

Also, we will be helping the online community feel a part of St Peter's. We will offer online prayer requests and plan a visit and have people to show them around so that they can be welcomed in person. We aim to grow our digital community. We are so lucky to have Ethan and his energy. Once Archdeacon Mark discovered Ethan's skills, he has been trying to lure him away ever since.

Secondly, an opportunity has presented itself for us to grow in our care of creation. One of the international goals for Anglicans is to care for creation and we have a team who are keen to present a study in the atrium during Lent. Caring for creation is a growing concern, especially among our young people and it's important that we allow our faith to speak to this issue.

A third area we want to focus on is our remarkable relationship with Victory Church. Late last year the mandarin speaking congregation of about 150 people asked if they could join us. Vestry embraced the idea, and a covenant was drawn up which we signed at Chinese New Year. While keeping our cultural integrity, there are lots of ways we can work together. They have become a 2pm service here in the church. Last Sunday's meeting felt it would be good to have lunch together soon to get to know each other better and build from there in our cooperation.

Lastly, the Mission Action meeting felt we needed to grow family church. Family church is second and fourth weeks at 11:15am. This service is designed for families; the service is simpler, it has songs that include actions, the sermon is an extended children's talk, and it closes with a pizza lunch. Already we have found this service is attractive for families that want baptism, and each term, when the preschool comes, it blows out to about 80 people. But it is deliberately eucharistic, so that the children and young people get to feel comfortable with the best of our Anglican tradition.

A year of growth. Growth in our digital community, growth in care of creation, growth in our working with Victory church and growth in family church.

So, what can you do? It's all very well to have these plans but what can each one of us do?

Well, the first thing you can do is to speak positively about our year of growth to others. Gossip the Gospel if you like. Get behind it when you are chatting to friends, neighbors, family. Also, you can get behind the initiatives. For example, when we have lunch with Victory church come along. (They cook dumplings to die for.) You can go to *family church*, and invite others to attend. But the most important thing you can do is to pray for our year

of growth. Pray that we indeed follow Jesus' command to be salt and light to make a real difference in our world. To help us keep on track I'm going to ask that the Sunday intercessors include this prayer each week. Let's pray it now...

*God of mission,
who alone brings growth to your Church,
send your Holy Spirit to give vision to our planning,
wisdom to our actions,
joy to our worship,
and power to our witness.
Help our church grow in numbers,
in spiritual commitment to you,
and in service to our local community,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen*