

On Friday at TGI Drinks we had an interesting conversation about trust and what we see in the media. We realised few of us trusted images we saw on social media, (and even text at times) because with fast AI technology, images and text can be adapted with such ease, it is difficult to discern fake from reality. It is hard to know what voices to listen too, and it made we wonder about the questions we should be asking; and what or where, are the answers to the huge issues the world faces.

There has been much conversation in our own society recently as we try to understand what Hate legislation might look like, in a way that allows the voice of the other to be heard in a non-abusive way in a democracy – it is not an easy question or answer.

I guess -linked to this - is who has a voice. In London, one of my neighbours was an amazing social history photographer and she photographed many marches and protests. I remember a very powerful conversation with her about her work – how do you give a voice, visually, to those who feel that their questions are not being answered. She was describing

the challenges of portraying a voice of those who are angry in a way that conveys a message that might be heard. How do we represent an issue and a voice?

Paul this morning in our reading from Corinthians is in many ways defending his voice, while at the same time exploring the responsibility that believers have as ambassadors of God's voice in the human context. At a time of conflicting opinions about what or even where God's answer might be; how do we express the voice of God's - the word of the voiceless? Where do we find God's voice in difficult times?

There is a pain in Paul's voice which he is not the first to express. Indeed, we hear it also expressed in the words of Isaiah as well. In these ancient texts we hear lament – the yearning for God to hear the pain of the people. We hear in verse 3 "Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?" The people are desperately seeking justice from God. God responds in the words of challenge – they cry out for help but continue to oppress others. For Isaiah, those who pour out themselves for

the sake of justice and righteousness need not fear abandonment of God. It is to them the light of God's salvation will shine. But Isaiah is clear, do not expect change if you are part of the problem!

Today we also hear an excerpt from what is commonly known as the Sermon on the Mount – the single longest group of teachings Jesus offered to those who followed him. Whether this teaching took place at a single event or to some crowd – doesn't really matter. Rather what does matter is that the gospel writers saw this teaching as the central doctrine of Jesus message as the Messiah.

Today those listening are told that they are the salt of the earth. This might seem like a strange comparison for us who are told to avoid salt or know the results of saline on the landscape – but we have to understand the power that salt had in Jesus culture and in many ways still has today. Salt is essential to life as it allows for the proper function of the human body along with the other life forms on earth. We think of salt as a seasoning or as a pollutant, but it also serves as a

preservative and disinfectant. Salt is a common substance, and in Jesus' day it was highly valued, even serving as a unit of exchange.

Jesus goes on to repeat his point by using the example of light. The message which both Jesus and Isaiah can convey is an understanding that to practice righteousness (that is integrity) is to restore the beauty in community. That is, we explore the questions and the answers society faces together with integrity and justice.

The key phrase in Jesus' message however is the use of the present tense – Jesus is not saying that these things will happen in the future – that the community will be cleansed or that people will be of value; rather he is saying that these things are taking place now!

Those who follow Jesus don't merely sit back and receive abundant life or simply tell others about what a great abundant life we have.

Jesus is talking here about a life that makes a difference for others in the world.

We is the tastiness that adds salt to lives around us. We is the light that makes plain the way of Justice God requires. Jesus says

we must be tasty and radiant in order to make a difference for God in the world. Neither salt nor light exists for themselves. They only fulfil their purpose when they are used.

Jesus says to the crowd – don't hide these things because if salt is not salty or light is hidden, they are rendered ineffective. We might not have the concept of a bushel like the crowds in Jesus' day – but we will understand what it means to hide, or to keep things hidden.

I wonder what are the examples in our own lives, both individually and as a community, of things that we keep hidden? When we hide the good we are doing, when we do not allow ourselves to take affect - then our purpose is wasted. The truth is that it is the bushels – the barriers we create - that block out God's light!

We might block out the light of God for others through our lack of confidence, or by comparing ourselves with bigger and more vibrant churches, or by believing that we have no power to bring about change. Or maybe we block out the light by being self-

absorbed by the issues in our own lives and community and allow those issues to limit the light of God for others.

The substance of Jesus message is that to be the light and salt – we have to act, we have to be active, and we need to not put barriers in the way that take away the effectiveness of God’s light and love in our lives, or the lives of others.

But what does this mean in the face of the pain of our current age? Where is the light in the face of this overwhelming and violent darkness?

Firstly, we have a responsibility to respond – to extend compassion, assistance and comfort to those who are hurting. We also have a commission from God to bring about change – to use our voice to ask questions about why this has happened, to ensure that we change any of our behaviours that might bring about this impact, and to actively pray for all who are affected.

We also have a responsibility to be clear – to reflect the light of Christ and to be a voice that says – this is not God. God did not make

this happen – to show the God of Love that would never endorse this kind of hatred.

Jesus' message is a vision of hope and fulfilment of what is possible for all disciples. To remind us of what is common and essential. The call to let our light shine on what challenges us today – as much as it did for those first disciples; and so we are asked to consider where does the world need salt and light now? And more importantly how might we be light and salt be a voice in these situations?

Even in the face of despair God asks us to remember that we are never alone, and to remember to *let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to God in heaven (Matt 5:16)*.

Because is living out those words we have an opportunity to explore both the answers and the questions of our age – but more importantly to give a voice which might reflect God in our world. Amen.