



## **A Homily by The Right Reverend Susan J.A. Bell**

Fiercely Loved Pride Celebration

Sunday, June 7, 2020

Scripture Reference: Matthew 5:13-16

*+I speak to you in the name of our triune God: Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.*

I also speak to you as one who is an ally, a friend, someone who has walked alongside my dearest friends (you know who you are) and colleagues in the 2S&LGBTQIA+ Community, with fierce love and equally fierce support in my heart for the often difficult path you have had to walk.

Now as a Church we have just come through this great journey - this great sweep of liturgical time – through death and resurrection then ascension and Pentecost. And we're mindful that the Holy Spirit is again leading us into new understandings of the depth and breadth of the Gospel message.

And as we've walked with Jesus through this time – through those events - we have seen all that human nature can serve up: devotion, betrayal, truth, lies, violence, fear, peace and much more. So much upheaval, so much revelation and so much perspective-altering, world-altering change.

But surely THE point of all of it – the point of all the effort, obedience, pain and redemption, death and resurrection is that Jesus shows us that Love wins.

Every time. Love wins.

And there's more. Because of that, this hard won, but precious self-giving love now shows us the way. As disciples, everything we think and say and do must now be sifted through God's law of love. That's what it means to have gone on that journey with Jesus and come out the other end. This is what we've learned – this is how that journey has formed us. And what we know after all that, is that God's love is serious love. It is deep and it is profound and persistent -and it's total.

I really see that in our Gospel reading.

What we have in our few verses is a part of the great sermon on the mount. You know those beautiful words with which Jesus blesses the crowds who have followed him. He straight up blesses them. And that may come as a bit of a surprise to us because I think we often read these words as a list of stipulations in order to be blessed but that's not the case.

Jesus blesses all kinds of people the world doesn't always call blessed. And that being the case, I think we have to ask the question: what does this say about the God who sends Jesus to us in the first place? About the quality and content of God's love?

And then what might it say about the people who have been called to follow him?

Those called blessed are those who mourn and are meek; those who are poor in spirit and merciful; those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. These are the people God blesses and in turn calls us to bless.

They're not the rich and the secure and the powerful.

And when Jesus carries on and says we are salt and light – that's exactly what he means – again, there are no stipulations – it's not that he says we'd better be salt and light. Nor does he tell us how to become salt and light. Or the kinds of things we should be doing if we're going to continue being salt and light.

Nope.

Jesus says you are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. So these words point out God's favour or blessing toward us, not God's demand. That's the first thing we need to notice.

And that's interesting because I think sometimes we have a hard time receiving God's blessing – especially if the world we live in hasn't exactly tracked with the Lord in terms of determining who deserves blessing.

And on the other hand, I think we also have a hard time even believing that God wants to bless us in the first place. That probably goes to how we view God. For that's often a troubled view – and certainly not based on the evidence before us in the scriptures.

Perhaps we can only imagine God as a stern, demanding law-giver? If that's the case, it would seem out of character for that God to bless without requirement or without wanting us to be different or offer up some change.

But based on Jesus' words, that doesn't seem to be the case here. You are salt and light. End of story. And I think Jesus goes even further than simple identification. I think he's saying:

Don't forget that you are the salt of the earth. So be the fullness of who you are. Salt that doesn't taste like what it is, is useless. In other words, no diminution of who you are is possible if you are to fulfill God's mission of love in this world. You must be who you were created to be. And remember that you are blessed and beloved.

You are the light of the world. What good is a light that is hidden. So be the fullness of who you are. Be who you were created to be and shine brightly.

In doing so you are a blessing for the world, for our Church, for our communities. First, words of blessing. And then an understanding of how you are to live out that blessing.

That's how God works. We are loved and blessed – before everything else, we are loved and blessed. This is so important for us to know – like really know. To let that knowledge settle into our bones and work its way into our minds and our hearts.

It's important because I worry there is often a false dichotomy between the people who we have been created to be and our identity as Christians. That sets us up for a separation from God.

And I have another worry: and that is that so much of the pain of this world is, I think caused by our disconnection from God and by extension from each other. And yet we can see that that disconnection is indeed a work of darkness. For whatever reason one of our sins is to divide and distinguish. To separate and to have in-groups and out-groups. But that's down to us. That's not God's Modus operandi as it were. God's way is to bless and to love and to seek union and togetherness.

The words of our psalm show us that surely – that God loves us so fiercely that God almost hounds us from place to place – dogging our footsteps – there is no place that we can in truth hide from the love of God. God pursues us relentlessly seeking union with us.

Imagine the deepest and truest love you have ever experienced – and then multiply it by a 100 – and I promise you, that doesn't even begin to touch the sides of how God loves us. You are “fearfully and wonderfully made” in God's image.

So you see, I don't see any separation there. There's no air between the God who loves us – who “has knit our inward parts” and us. You are a beloved child of God.

These are words – truths - that it is important to travel our whole lives with. If the blessing of God travels with us; if the knowledge of God's love is our foundation, then any human-made division we can come up with can be exposed as false in the light of that love.

You're blessed, you're loved – fiercely loved. And you indeed have a treasured place in the family of things, and the family of our Church. We are blessed by your witness, blessed by your ministry, blessed by the many ways the light of your love points us towards God's purposes for our world and the beauty and diversity found within it. So, thank-you, more than I can say, for being the beloved person God created and called you to be.

I'll end with a prayer that expresses these things: it's the prayer of St. Theresa of Avila:

May today there be peace within.  
May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be.  
May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith.  
May you use those gifts that you have received,  
and pass on the love that has been given to you.  
May you be content knowing you are a child of God.  
Let this presence settle into your bones,  
and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love.  
It is there for each and every one of us.  
Amen.