

Open our eyes, Lord and help us see. Amen

In today's gospel, Jesus says, **"You are salt for the earth. You are light for the world."** These are heady compliments. The Lord has confidence in his people and how they will, in his power, affect the world. Now we all know people who embody these qualities. The ones who are like table salt, improving supper's good flavour. You feel that when they are around life is just fuller and better, something other than ordinary. And the ones who are like warm lamps, shining into the dark corners of the house. When they are there you feel comforted and hopeful, at home. And the ones who are like cities perched on hilltops, relaying encouragement and hope like beacons in the darkness. When they are there, you feel courage to face dark and dangerous times, you feel equipped to give yourself to principles and causes larger than yourself. Salt and light. We give thanks for those people. We are drawn to them. And Jesus says, we are them. **"You are salt for the earth. You are light for the world."** We are those by whom the rest of the world is being drawn to God. What? Who me? Yes, you.

Jesus is calling us to be unmistakable signs of God's love and grace; God's kingdom, taking root in our world. But we don't do that alone. In fact, we couldn't. So we are joined together as a people in the Lord's body and we are joined together with him. Our baptism grafted us onto that body of faithful people living in union with Jesus. (As Abigail will be grafted and joined this morning in her baptism.) If we are salt and light, we are salt and light because we are in Christ. We are salt and light because we bear his Spirit and receive our power from that Spirit. And because of that there are times when we might feel like we can be like salt and light. Perhaps there are times when we feel that we can flavour a flat gathering with our love and our presence. Perhaps we can shine a light into the occasional dark place or situation. Perhaps we can be a light on a hill, shining as beacons of hope when dark times come.

I don't know about you, but for me, the last few weeks and months have been a very dark and turbulent time. The inauguration of Donald Trump, the renewed boldness of extreme right wing factions in American society and elsewhere, the travel bans imposed last weekend and Sunday's violent attack on folks at prayer in a Quebec city mosque are all witnesses to that turbulence. We live in a very small world and what happens to anyone, happens to us all. We are aware in ways we never could

have been before the internet connected us all. And we cannot pretend or hide from what is happening. Many people of good will are sounding an alarm, calling us to wakefulness and vigilance about a gathering darkness that seems to be invading political discourse in our time. It is characterized by an inward-looking and ultimately selfish concern for our own comfort and security, a walling-in of wealth and resources, a refusal to share, a suspicious and hostile stance toward the “stranger” and the “other”, and a lack of respect for the basic human dignity of anyone who is vulnerable. My friends, these are not gospel values. As Karoline Lewis, a Lutheran preacher from St. Paul Minnesota has said, *“...the Gospel does not censor. It does not silence the already oppressed. It does not cast suspicion on those who are other. It does not act out of fear. It does not bar membership. It does not legislate inclusion. It does not look aside and say that God’s earth isn’t hurting. It does not ban the perceived outsider. It does not build walls to keep others out. The gospel is a truth-teller.”* What we are beginning to see in the political discourse south of our borders and indeed, from some seeking leadership in our own country are gospel-less values. They stand in opposition to everything good that God has shown to us in the holy and incarnate Son, Jesus. Regardless of our politics, I believe we are compelled, as people of salt and light, to speak against this dangerous tide that is sweeping over and around us.

Thankfully, I see that happening. A million protesters; men, women and children in Washington D.C. on inauguration weekend joined by a million others around the world in places as far flung as Europe, the Philippines, Australia and even little Sandy Cove, Digby County. This week people throughout Canada joined in peaceful vigil and prayer to remember those lost in Quebec City. Others joined hands to make a human chain around mosques at prayer time so that those inside would know folks were in solidarity with them and supporting their right to pray in peace. Some of us, our families and friends, participated in these events expressing both our anger and our sadness and our desire to be better. Many hearts are joined in prayer and many voices are raised in protest for peace and sanity to gain the upper hand. Some will say that such things do not make a difference, but as Confucius is reputed to have said *“It is better to light one small candle than to curse the darkness.”* No matter how small the candle we light, no matter how insignificant our positive action, it can have an effect. This year I have learned this through my contact with the Hrez family. We cannot save every refugee, but we can and have made a

difference in the Hrez family's life and that is huge! And they have, in turn, made a difference to me. Every time I go to visit them, I am nervous and fearful. The barriers of language and culture seem to put distance between us. But they have received me so much more warmly than I have approached them and they have enlarged my heart toward the 'stranger' in our midst and they have taught me, and helped me, I hope, to preserve my heart from the rhetoric of fear and suspicion that seems so pervasive these days. Folks, don't let fear and suspicion control your responses! We are indeed changed and made more salty, more light-giving by the encounters we have one by one. So do not discount the possibility that God can use you to bring light and flavour and goodness to someone else by what you say and do. In fact, as Jesus tells us in Matthew's gospel, it is one act of kindness at a time that brings the kingdom of God into being and saves the world: **"Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."**

May we shine so holy and brightly and live with such zest and flavour, that others may see and come to God and that better kingdom for which we live and pray. Salt and light. Just the remedy for flat, fearful, dark and dangerous times. **Amen**