

and we get it wrong when we present as colluding with corruption and injustice, as greedy and grasping, as inconsiderate and uncaring. When we present as caring about our own well being to the detriment of all and everything around us.

There is a saying that originated for the sailors (jacks) returning from war and not being recognised for their deeds but ignored and left to cope ~ “up the ladder Jack” or pull up the ladder jack” it expresses the attitude of “every man for himself, survival of the fittest, devil take the hindmost, but worse than that all the possible advantages (however gained), success (however won) and satisfaction (whatever the cost to others) belong to me first!”. It is this type of narrow-focus, narrow-gauge pseudo-Darwinian selfishness glorified as a sensible philosophy of society and life that is totally unacceptable to God.

Living in this way makes us no better than the people of God who Isaiah challenges because they fasted for attention not to meet with God in new ways. Paul writes that we have received the Spirit, not of the world but of God, so that we might understand what God has freely given.

So ~ what are we to do with these four ‘green’ weeks ~ how are we to consolidate and understand in readiness for learning more?

Looking at our gospel today I would suggest that, through the Spirit, Matthew is telling us loud and clear what to do!

Matthew writes that you and I are the salt of the earth but that if we lose our saltiness or are not strong enough to flavour the world around us we are no longer honouring God. We are the light of the world (because Christ the Light of the World lives in us) but if we dim or extinguish that light in our lives ~ again we do not honour God.

You and I need to spend time recognising what saltiness God has equipped us with ~ what issues burn in our hearts ~ how can we respond and make a difference ~ however small?

We need also to be recognised and nurture the light of the world in our hearts ~ because if we feed that light and it burns its love within us we cannot hide it and ignore the needs in God’s creation. We may feel that the light is just a flicker and that whatever we do will be insignificant ~ that is hiding the light under a bowl ~ Matthew says “let your light shine before others” he does not specify how bright or strong that light needs to be ~ whatever you have use it to show God’s love to others. You may never know what impact shining your light has but God will and so will whoever has been helped by the light that you have shared.

And you know what ~ you will be **knowing Jesus more** through your actions and will be **making Him known**.

Ministry Musings (5th February 2017)

As the church Season changes and we prepare to begin Lent the teaching in God’s Word turns to exploring the difference between ritualistic offerings and practice and the offerings made in righteousness.

Isaiah gives prophetic word about true fasting ~ not for attention but for the opportunity to come closer to God. God is not impressed with a people who fast but continue to go their own way, not reflecting His love to others

Knowing Jesus more should result in loosing the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke (slavery in all its forms physical and spiritual), instilling in us the desire to share our food with the hungry, provide shelter for the refugee and asylum seeker, the streetwalkers and sleepers, clothe the naked and not turn away from our own flesh and blood! Obviously in human and material terms individual finances and resources would never take the strain of helping absolutely everyone in need BUT that is not what is being asked of us! We are asked to be alert and aware of needs and to respond when God’s Holy Spirit prompts us. Some of us will have finances to offer, others the ability to provide food or clothing or the gift of listening and counsel. Add all the gifts and resources God gives together and the body of Christ can, and should, make a difference and reveal God’s love in this place.

The important reassurance and lesson in the 1st epistle to the church of Corinth is that none need to be eloquent, we have to be faithful and offer our best as it is given by God. We need to learn how to let God minister through us and not be afraid to recognise our weaknesses ~ then the prophecy of Isaiah comes to fruition

“What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived” ~ the things God has prepared for those who love him’
Isaiah 64: 4

The spirit of God helps us to understand what God has freely given us and reveals to us our secret or hidden thoughts ~ those things that no-one knows but us unless we choose to share them (which usually we don’t)! Each of us, as we are refined, have the potential to be salt and light in a material world; to set an example and show the way. Matthew asks us whether we would leave flavouring out of our food or hide away the light in our room ~ that is what happens if we are not **Knowing Jesus ~ making Him known**

Isaiah 58:1–9a, (9b, 12)
1 Corinthians 2:1–12, (13–16),
Matthew 5:13–20

OT page 698,
NT page 163
NT page 4

Do you notice when the church seasons change?
What do you look for when you come to church to tell you?

Here at Immanuel we usually print on the Open Door which Sunday of the year it is and the colour of the priests stole changes to reflect the time of the year the church is journeying through, though the colours repeat so it takes time to associate what the colours represent at different times in the year. Just to complicate it there are weeks in the churches season known as the Ordinary weeks! The Ordinary are the weeks between the major times of preparation and celebration.

We begin four such Sundays today and will do so again for all the weeks following the celebration of Trinity until we reach All Saints Day in November.

So when a church colour changes it is a prompt that we are reflecting on what the Spirit reveals to us about the Love of God through Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. We may be consolidating information and forming our understanding, we may be preparing to take in more information or revelation or we may be celebrating what it all means in our lives! There is an ebb and flow in the faith journey we are making if we chose to recognise it and go with it!

These four ‘green’ weeks are the weeks leading into Lent. They are a time to consolidate all the information we have received in Christmastide and get ready to see how all of that fits into the bigger picture of what God has done for us.

This morning we heard, in the writings of Isaiah, of the people of God who did not consolidate or understand all they knew of God’s love for them. A people, who persisted in going it alone or trying to deny God in the way they lived and behaved. In a way they had got half of the picture ~ they sought to know more of God but did not respond to what God revealed to them ~ they delighted in knowing He was God and trusted He would be there for them BUT day to day they disregarded what He asked of them ~ until they were in trouble or facing disaster ~ and then they would rush back to Him and ask what they should do or for God to intervene without them changing. Their attitude showed in everything they did ~ so they followed what they thought God asked of them ~ they fasted ~ but God had asked that they fast to come closer to Him and what they were doing was fasting to get His attention. They made a big show of their fast and then asked God ~ did you not see us when we fasted?

What God saw was their pretence because they were doing as they pleased and that included exploiting their workers, quarrelling and disrespecting each other.

God tells them that they cannot fast in this way and expect to be heard by Him. Fasting is not about greed in any way ~ it is about humility, recognising one’s faults and failings and trying to correct them so that every individual reflects an aspect of God’s love and provision; ~ Looking out for those suffering injustice, sharing food and shelter (or income to provide it). It is not turning away from your own flesh and blood, It is about embracing God’s creation however difficult, however broken, and working towards healing and reconciliation. It is about doing all this even if you feel isolated, alone and rejected by a world that persists in going its own way. Then God says those who fast to come close to Him and respond to the needs in His creation will be blessed and will have revealed to them all that God had prepared for them and they will be known as the Repairers of broken walls and Restorers of streets with dwellings. Those who honour God will be like a well watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.

Honouring God is not about waiting to be fully equipped, it is about trying to prepare as fully as possible ~ being sensibly resourced but knowing that the preparing will continue each step of the journey, new supplies will be taken on board. Paul, as he writes his first epistle to the church in Corinth, tells them that he did not come with eloquence or human wisdom ~ but with the testimony of God ~ Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Paul did not set out to be persuasive in his preaching or even wise, just with the honesty of the Holy Spirit. Why? Because our faith cannot rest on human wisdom but on God’s power.

God’s power of course is perfect wisdom, not man made but divine, and as we grow in faith we are able to recognise this in a mature way, we begin to see the sometimes cavernous divide and sometimes fine line between doing things our way and doing them God’s way and we understand the need to change ~ to be channels to begin reveal God’s love in His world.

We are not expected to be able to reveal everything about God ~ just the glimpses of His love that He equips us to reveal ~ Paul quotes Isaiah 64:4

“What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard,
and what no human mind has conceived” ~
the things God has prepared for those who love him— “

as the things that will be revealed to us by the Holy Spirit ~ and goes on to remind us that no-one knows what we really think in our hearts except the Spirit within us ~ we present to the world what we want the world to see ~