

Sunday, February 5, 2023 Epiphany 5

**You are Salt and Light**

***Isaiah 58:1-9 and Matthew 5:13-20***

On Thursday February 2, the famous Warton Willie groundhog made his spring prediction at 8:07 a.m. that winter may be ending sooner rather than later. This is because he did not see his shadow. The reason he did not see his shadow? It was dark and the sun was covered by clouds. But had Willie done his work the next morning or even any of the last three days when the sun has been bright in the sky, maybe the winter season would be lasting longer!

Of course the predictions of groundhogs and the oncoming days of winter and spring have been taking place for years as people get tired of cold winds, temperatures, ice and snow and the idea of looking to spring brings hope that enables us to emerge from our needed shelters. But what most people may not realize is that Groundhog Day is actually rooted in astronomy—and the movement of the Earth around the Sun. In the Northern Hemisphere, this date marks the midpoint between the winter solstice in December and the spring equinox in March. In fact, the special day stems from an ancient Celtic celebration called Imbolc, which is something called a cross-quarter day. It was called Imbolc, an Old Irish tradition that is most often translated as “in the belly” referring to the soon-to-arrive lambs of spring. The celebration of Imbolc signaled that the Sun was halfway through its advance towards the spring equinox, and the season of new birth and light was on the horizon.

But there is also a Christian festival of light called Candlemas which refers to the custom of blessing and distributing candles which signify Jesus as the Light of the world! The song often shared states: *“If Candlemas be fair and bright, Come, Winter, have another flight; If Candlemas brings clouds and rain, Go Winter, and come not again.”* So whether we look to the groundhog’s prediction or remember that Jesus is the light of the world—the need for the sun both in the Sky and the Son of God come together as we experience winter.

How have you been feeling and thinking these past weeks since we celebrated Christ's birth? In the month of January our skies in this city have been clouded over for 63% of the time. That is on most days in the month we have not seen the sun but experienced clouds, rain or snow. Yet as people, we need the light of the sun to lift us up and to see that there is hope for a new day. But is it in these darker January days that we look for the way of Christ and how to live and walk His way. Yet when we listen to the news each day we have difficulties because there is much loss, grief, uncertainty, need, and people are searching for something better. There are more living on streets, needing foodbanks and everyday items to survive. There are people being killed and fires causing destruction; there are battles raging around the world and yet here we sit and what do we do? We sit quietly and watch because we too are in need- of comfort care and the ability to reach out to others who are also in need. But we have something to offer that is so worthwhile yet we are afraid to share it.

Isaiah's prophesy (Ch.58) describes a dialogue between God and his faithful servant whose desire is to serve and seek acceptance by God. Isaiah asks the question about fasting, being humble, serving others and showing self-interests, oppressing others, and points out the need for humility. That is the need to be accepted? The prophet then continues to ask the question about fasting and the choices that we might make. And it is in these choices that we can show others the teachings of God as Christ has taught later generations. It is in these choices of justice, equity, feeding the hungry, bringing the homeless into shelter and covering them with clothes. For Isaiah states that if we do this- we will shine our light which breaks forth into darkness, like the sun's rays at dawn.

There is something about seeing the sun breaking up the dark sky in the morning – it opens our eyes and hearts to new possibilities as the day begins. And this is only a glimpse of the glory of God that is promised for us in heaven. Isaiah then states, "you shall call and the Lord will answer, you shall cry for help and he will say, Here I am." God hears your call in the

times of bright winter sun-filled days and in the moments when you may feel yourself in the darkness of your world. And God answers!

Jesus continued his Sermon on the Mount in the reading from Matthew 13. In this passage he speaks about salt and light. Salt was a valuable trading commodity because it was not only used for cooking, but with no refrigeration it was essential for preserving food meats and produce. So when Jesus says, "You are the salt of the earth;" he is saying to the large crowd on the mountain "you are worthy as a part of God's creation." Jesus states you are good and honest people and you are worthy and valuable in God's sight. You are like the salt that helps preserve what there is around us.

Just think how salt enhances the flavour of the food we eat. Sometimes a food item just needs a little something—adding salt just makes it better. Just think about the amazing snack food- the potato chip—real potatoes are kind of bland but when you add salt—not too much—stores cannot keep them in stock! But what happens if salt sits in a cupboard without being in a container that is closed tightly. It dries out and clumps. The saltiness leaves and it is of no value except maybe helping to melt ice on the streets. Saltiness is one of the basic human tastes and in its base form it is used in the manufacture of PVC (plastic), paper pulp, in the production of aluminium, soaps and glycerine, synthetic rubber and pottery. Salt also has anti-inflammatory and anti-bacterial properties which reduce congestion, sanitize, and open the airways. This treatment is used to relieve the symptoms of allergies, asthma, bronchitis, COPD and the common cold. And this is the purpose of this salt lamp- an interesting invention combining salt and light!

Jesus also states you are the light of the world. This might be confusing in one way when we call Jesus the light who has come into the world. We also know that he has called himself the light. But when we listen to Jesus' words here- he says the city built on a hill is seen because of the lights which shine. And when you light a lamp you don't hide it, but put it on a

lampstand or table in order that the room will be brighter. So when he says, let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

We might wonder what light?

Here Jesus is referring to the light that shines through us and in us because that light comes from him through our faith and devotion to him. So we must walk his way, reflect his light and know that the Light that shines in and through us will guide us and help us to do what is right and fulfills our calling—that is justice, kindness and being humble. But this light also gives us the hope we each need every day and many times in any day when we find ourselves in dark spaces or worrying, or wondering or facing uncertainties in life. This is the light of Christ that comes into the world in Jesus and by faith never leaves. The question is whether we are walking in the lit path set for each of us. Are we living the path of Christ—are we salty and reflecting Jesus? Or are we turning within our being and receiving Christ's light and only absorbing it for ourselves? Just what calls us to be the salt and light today? How are you sharing Jesus with others?

PRAYER:

God of love, we strive to be salt and light and yet we wonder how we might fully live out this calling in praise and love of Jesus. Show us your way to live and love as we seek your vision for us today and every day. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.