

**New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario
Sunday, February 5, 2017**

Rev. Andrew Reid

Isaiah 58:1-12; Psalm 112:1-10; Matthew 5:13-20

“Salt, light”

Last Sunday, as we were reluctantly – very reluctantly – enjoying our last breakfast in Bermuda, I found myself standing in the buffet in our hotel, waiting for my toast to pop out. I became aware of a figure beside me. It was one of the staff: not a waiter, but one of those people who were responsible for keeping the buffet fully supplied. He was not moving, just standing there with a faraway look in his eyes. As I looked closer, I saw that there were tears in his eyes. When he saw me looking, he kind of shook himself and started to apologize. By this time, tears were streaming down his cheeks. I asked if he was OK. He wiped his eyes and said that he was, then he went on, ‘I am from Somalia. I came to Bermuda to make enough money to bring my family here as well. Now with what President Trump has just done, I don’t know if I will ever see them again.’ And before I could say anything more, he turned and hurried away.

And I thought, ‘You poor fellow. You are just trying to make a better life for your family and yourself, and this is how you are treated. You are the salt of the earth.’

We flew home that night, from Bermuda to Toronto, then from Toronto to London. As we sat at the Westjet gate, waiting for the London flight, we were sitting beside two young people, a guy and a girl, both millennials, and in his case quite a hipster. They hadn’t been travelling together, but they were law students, and obviously shared classes. They talked about their workload and their classes and their teachers and papers that they were working on. And as they talked, like most millennials and hipsters, I could see that they each had one eye on their smartphones. All of a sudden, I heard the young woman say, ‘Oh, my God – there has been a shooting in Quebec!’ Of course, it was the

shooting at the mosque in Quebec City. They both started looking for news, checking all the sites they could find. And as they read, tears were running down the cheeks of that millennial girl and the hipster guy.

And I thought, 'You dear kids. Never forget what you are feeling right now. Let it fire you up, let it inspire you to work through your calling as lawyers to make a better, more peaceful world. If salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.'

This has been a roller-coaster week: anger, grief, sadness, frustration, weariness, grit, fortitude, determination, hope, resolve, all wrapped up and woven together into an utterly exhausting mix of emotion.

But it has been a week of action too. The crowds that overwhelmed the airports in New York, chanting 'Let them in.' The hundreds of people who gathered outside the Oxford Street mosque on Monday to express their shock and support. The members of the synagogue in Victoria, Texas, who handed the keys of the synagogue over to members of their town's only mosque that had been burned down. City politicians unanimously backing a call to make London a sanctuary city, one that, in Councillor Tanya Parks' words, stands against discrimination, exclusion and hate, and welcomes individuals from Syria, Iran, Sudan, Iraq, Yemen, Libya and Somalia. The vigils that have been held here in London and all across Canada, including an estimated 1,000 people, some of you among them, in Victoria Park on Thursday night. The words on our sign at the front of the church – I make no apology that they are almost exactly the same words as I saw on the sign outside the mosque on Tuesday.

A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.

'You are the light of the world ... let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in

heaven.’ Matthew 5:14,16. Has there ever been a time when the world needed salt and light more than right now? Of course, I am sure there have been, but I can’t think of many.

But now is the time for people of every faith and of none, to stand up and speak up for justice and tolerance and acceptance, and against injustice and intolerance and hatred. And now is the time for people of every political persuasion and none, to stand up and speak up for justice and tolerance and acceptance, and against injustice and intolerance and hatred. And it is time for followers of Jesus Christ to let our light shine before others so that they may give glory to our Father in heaven. And maybe most especially, it is time for followers of Jesus Christ of the Presbyterian persuasion to let our light shine before others so that they may give glory to our Father in heaven.

When religious fanaticism is blamed for terrorism; when conservative Christians seem to find no difficulty in responding to supposed threats with violence and oppression; when national security is used as justification for injustice; when hate speech masquerades as political rhetoric; when voices of reason are silenced and people of wisdom, compassion and sense are brushed aside; when instead of welcoming the stranger and housing the homeless and feeding the hungry and defending the vulnerable, people are turned away and rejected: then it is time for followers of Jesus Christ to be the salt and light that he calls us to be. And to do it fearlessly and unashamedly.

I don’t know whether it is a true story or not, but it is said that General William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, was only once heard to swear. It was when he was given a report of a study that the Army had commissioned on child prostitution in Victorian London. When he finished reading it, he closed it, started to pound his fist on his desk, and said, ‘Damn, damn, damn, damn, damn.’

I put it to you that this may be a time when followers of Jesus Christ,

people who are salt and light in the world, even mild-mannered and polite Presbyterians like us, need to start to say 'Damn, damn, damn, damn, damn.'

And then we need to act. We need to take our anger, and let it inspire us to feed the hungry, house the homeless, clothe the naked, welcome the refugee, defend the vulnerable, treat people with respect and dignity, honour the Christ in all people.

Or in your case, New St James, continue to feed the hungry, continue to house the homeless, continue to clothe the naked, continue to welcome the refugee, continue to defend the vulnerable, continue to treat people with respect and dignity, continue to honour the Christ in all people. To do anything less is to put our lamp under the proverbial bushel basket.

By the way, did you know that Friday was the one year anniversary of the arrival in Canada of the first Karen family sponsored by the London Ecumenical Refugee Committee. YESSS!!!

People of New St James, it is time to put your light on a lampstand and let it shine before others, so that it may give light to all, and so that all may continue to see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.