

A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Thus says the Lord:

Is this not the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke
to let the oppressed to go free
and to break every yoke?

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?
Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator shall go before you,
the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.
Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.
If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,
if you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.

Pause for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

A reading from the first letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

When I came to you, brothers and sisters,
I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you
in lofty words or wisdom.
For I decided to know nothing among you
except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.
And I came to you in weakness and in fear
and in much trembling.
My speech and my proclamation
were not with plausible words of wisdom,
but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power,
so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom
but on the power of God.



Pause for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING – A 05

The Lord be with you.

And with your spirit.

A reading from the holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord

Jesus said to his disciples:

“You are the salt of the earth;

but 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.

You are the light of the world.

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.

In the same way,

let your light shine before human beings,

so that they may see your good works

and give glory to your Father in heaven.”



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

Reading I: Isaiah 58:7-10

This passage is more familiar as a Lenten reading. The verses immediately preceding this excerpt pose the question of true fasting. Today's verses give the answer: True fasting is sharing our bread with the hungry.

But the preceding question is omitted today, since we are not in the Lenten fast. The effect is to throw the emphasis on the consequence of sharing one's bread: "Then shall your light break forth like the dawn ... then shall your light rise in the darkness."

This makes the reading appropriate for the post-Epiphany season, which is concerned not only with the epiphany of God in Christ but also with the Christian life as an epiphany of God's love for us.

The theme of the Christian as a light in the world's darkness is then taken up in the refrain of the responsorial psalm and in the Gospel.

Responsorial Psalm 112:4-5, 6-7, 8-9

Psalm 112 sets out the characteristics of the just or righteous person in the style of the wisdom literature. It is to be noted that the refrain, though based on verse 4a of the psalm, does not say quite the same thing.

When the psalm itself speaks of light, this means the reward the upright person receives for well-doing—a state of general well-being as contrasted with "darkness," that is, affliction.

The refrain, however, distinguishes between the just and the upright person in a way the psalm does not, and makes the former a light—that is, a source of well-being—for the latter.

When analyzed, the thought of the refrain is really far from clear, though its intention is obvious, namely, to relate the psalm to the Old Testament reading and the gospel, both of which speak of the righteous as a source of light.

One may hope, in the interests of clarity and of faithfulness to the text of Scripture, that this refrain will be reconsidered when the Lectionary comes up for review.

Reading II: 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

It has often been thought that Paul changed his preaching at Corinth because of his failure at Athens (Acts 17). In preaching to the Stoics and Epicureans there, he had tried to

use sophisticated philosophical arguments, replete with literary allusions. So when he got to Corinth, he abandoned this style and concentrated on the message of the cross.

This is unlikely because in writing up Paul's visit to Athens, the author of Acts probably followed the custom of ancient historians, composing the Areopagus speech himself and putting it on Paul's lips. It is a sample of the Christian apologetic customary at the time Acts was written.

Accordingly, we must suppose that at Athens, as at Corinth, Paul followed his usual practice of preaching Christ crucified. At Athens his message was refused because the cross was a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles. Intellectuals did not, and still do not, want to hear about human sin and divine salvation through the cross of Jesus Christ—that is both the folly and the stumbling block.

The Corinthians' present behavior—their cliquishness and their pride in wisdom—is wholly inconsistent with the gospel of the cross as they had received it through Paul's preaching. The cross of Christ was the *Umwertung aller Werte*, the denial of all human wisdom and its accompanying pride.

The way the Corinthians are now behaving, one would think that Paul had not preached the message of the cross but lofty and plausible words of human wisdom, like the wandering preachers and charlatans so common in the Hellenistic world, Paul has only his weak words, yet God made these words the vehicle of his "Spirit and power."

And, after all, they did bring the Corinthians to faith.

Gospel: Matthew 5:13-16

The band of disciples, the nucleus of the future Church, is described under three metaphors: salt, a city on a hill, and a light in the world. The passage concludes with the well-known exhortation especially familiar to Anglicans as the first of Cranmer's invariable offertory sentences and so constantly heard Sunday by Sunday for three centuries: "Let your light shine before men."

The Sermon on the Mount does not say that the disciples are to become the salt, that they are to become like a city on a hill or make themselves a light amid the darkness of the world. They are all those things, and that because Jesus has called them and they have responded. Rather, they are expected to manifest what they are: "Let your light so shine before men."

How is this done? By good works.

Our text does not specify what these good works are. It is more concerned to insist that good works are not the meritorious deeds of the disciples themselves, for the world that sees them does not praise the disciples for them, but the heavenly Father.

The good works of the disciples point away from themselves to the grace of God through which they were wrought.

Reginald H. Fuller