Today, as we celebrate Green Communion Sunday, our gospel takes us back to basics.

Salt and light.

We know what they are.

No thorny theological concepts here for they are both part of nature, both quite ordinary in many ways….we encounter them daily and don’t even think about them….but also quite extraordinary, since in different ways they impact on everything around them.

Salt, of course, works in a way that is hidden. When you add it to a recipe, you don’t SEE the salt at work… and you can’t remove it again no matter how hard you try (we’ve all heard tales of unfortunate souls who substituted salt for sugar with less than tasty results)...

Used well, it enhances other natural flavours, changing everything for the better.

Just think of salt and shake crisps!

When we describe someone as the salt of the earth, we’re saying something particular about them.

Yes, they are people of good principles, people who absolute integrity we can rely on – but they may not always be that easy to spend time with.

You see, they are people who don’t compromise… who carry on holding the line no matter what… Their taste is wholesome but unmissable.

Jesus is very clear about how he feels about those who don’t stay true to themselves – who become like salt that has lost its flavour, through exposure to damp so that it is no longer really salt at all.

That “unsalty salt” was often mixed with gypsum as a drying material in the surface of Roman roads… most emphatically destined to be trampled underfoot, for it had lost its real purpose.

Jesus doesn’t mince his words here.

In the same way, Christians that adapt so completely to the secular word that there’s no way to distinguish them from their neighbours have let go of something essential.

We have a calling, you and I…. a calling to make a difference by living in a different kind of way.

That is something we let go of at our peril…. and it’s something to remember on this day when we focus on our relationship to and mistreatment of creation.

More of that later.

We can be secret salt – flavouring things for the better.

Light, on the other hand, works quite differently.

You are the light of the world

Interestingly, the Greek word that is used here for world is kosmon (the root of “cosmos”) – so we are to stand as light not just for humanity but for the whole of created order (this is the same word used in John 3:16 – God so loved the KOSMON..)

Ours is no narrowly human calling but something bigger, brighter, with an impact beyond what we might dare to expect.

If it is dark and you light a lamp – everything changes.

That’s the whole point of a lamp - to make a visible difference...
We need light in order to make sense of our surroundings, to stay safe, to do our work, to recognise our friends. Again, Jesus is anything but obscure in his teaching – and is not preaching obscurity to his disciples either.

“You must be like a city on a hill, like a lamp in full view” - outstanding, unmissable.

Illuminating everything through a confident proclamation that Jesus is Lord – and demonstrating his Lordship by the way we live.

In other words, we have a God-given responsibility to BE different and to MAKE a difference – and on this Green Communion Sunday there’s no doubt that we must use it.

The problem is real and pressing.

The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it – but we treat it as if it were a giant super-market full of infinite resources for us to plunder at will.

Instead of regarding the world as a sacramental sign of God’s loving involvement with every single created atom and cell, we behave as if we are the rightful inheritors of all things, but are spending our inheritance as fast as we can as if we’re determined to leave nothing behind for our children.

We believe that progress means more of everything – and we don’t seem to care about the cost.

That’s probably because we are not yet asked to pay it.

Again and again it is the poorest communities that are suffering first and worst from the consequences of climate change, and yet they are least to blame for causing it. They are the ones who are losing their land to the sea, whose low-lying islands are disappearing below the waves, whose crops are failing and who are more vulnerable to diseases such as malaria. In the low-lying islands of the Pacific and in the coastal areas of Bangladesh, rising sea levels are forcing families from their homes and villages as their land is lost to the sea, entire harvests are being destroyed by floods, and the increased salinity of the soil means some traditional staple crops no longer flourish. In Malawi, changing weather patterns mean farmers cannot produce enough food to support their families, and whole communities are struggling to survive.

And we do nothing.

I’m pretty sure that’s not what God had in mind…

Listen…

“Is not THIS the fast that I choose.
To loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free?
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house?”

And we all know that, while it is clearly imperative to feed the hungry, it would be even better to act to prevent their hunger. This IS Kingdom business, and so it is our business too.

Quite simply, if we stay silent and inactive in the face of this, then we are become exactly those whom God berates, speaking through Isaiah

“Look, you serve your own interest…”

To which I can only respond “Guilty as charged”

And yes, I’m speaking of myself here…

I’ve bought into the “more is better” drive of our consumer society. While I wear FairTrade clothes, - I’m not so worried about shoes. Yes, I now own a “FairPhone” - designed to avoid built in obsolence and made in a factory where the workers receive a fair wage for their labour BUT I enjoy using other electronic devices with less ethical pedigrees too.

I almost ALWAYS leave it too late to walk to work and I flew cheerfully to India and to Denmark last year – and back again too – and absolutely loved the experience – but have yet to engage with one of the programmes that enables me to off-set the impact of those flights by investing in tree planting.
I’m a mass of good intentions, which I don’t really follow through.
So I’m not pretending it’s easy.
But, you know, to shy away from the issues is not simply irresponsible.
I think it’s sinful too.
“Look, you serve your own interest”
And we are called to stand apart from the spirit of the age, when that spirit is one of greed and selfishness.
It may seem that environmental concern is a luxury we cannot afford in a world whose politics seem to be teetering on the brink of madness – but that could not be further from the case.
The environment IS political – but it is also, undeniably, a matter that impacts on our faith.
From creation through to Revelation, there is a thread that binds the world and humanity together in a relationship of respect and protection. The Church is called to shout out for justice, seeking and demanding peace and righteousness where it is lacking, to be voice for the voiceless.
And we can do this because we have hope....that the way things are is not the way things will always be....that change IS possible...that in face of death and defeat, God has other, wonderful plans.
“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 rearguard.”
Transformation and hope – cornerstones of the Christian world-view.
Can we, shall we be part of the new thing God is doing – as disciples, in this Cathedral, and in our world.?
Our task of reconciliation stretches out beyond human conflict to the reconciliation of our whole wounded planet.
We are called to leave behind the old ways, to set aside old habits that hurt other people, and to nurture new habits of life that will make a real difference.
We are called to make our longing for healing and reconciliation visible by the way we live, by the choices we make.
So – what should we do? What can we do, when we feel small and helpless at the enormity of the task.
First, I’d ask you to think and to pray with this really simple question.
Then, have a look at some of the ideas on the back page of your service booklet...and, whatever your usual practice, on this of all days PLEASE take that booklet home with you as you consider small lifestyle changes that you might make to reduce your own global footprint, ways to step outside the prevalent culture, to reduce consumption and invest instead in a culture of compassion and community, to live simply that others may simply live.
Then, perhaps, it might be time to write to your MP, to make clear that you aren’t content for taxpayers’ money to be spent on dirty energy, or to call on the Church Commissioners to disinvest in fossil fuels and focus on renewable energy.
Together, we can take seriously the need to become an “Eco church” - to look at the recommendations and address those areas where we fall short--because we are more visible together than apart.
We need not lose our savour – our distinctive understanding of the world, and of life, as a gift of love from a recklessly generous Creator – and nor must we ever take that gift for granted.
For the sake of God’s glory, for the sake of the poor, for the sake of all humanity, let’s invest in the future of the earth -
“Then your light shall rise in darkness and your gloom be like the noonday....
You shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail”.
Amen. Let it be so. Thanks be to God.