

I don't know if you ever watch Masterchef? Sarah & I sometimes get a bit hooked on it. There's one thing that I think John and Greg comment on more than anything else... Any ideas? Seasoning. Is this particular plate of food 'really well seasoned', or not.

By seasoning they mainly mean salt, because adding salt makes a big difference to how the food tastes - it draws out the flavour. You don't need much - but like John and Greg, you know when there isn't enough.

So salt is a very powerful image for Jesus to use when he's thinking about the difference we are meant to make. His followers may not be huge in number - but they can still make a very important difference to the world.

I find that encouraging. A few weeks ago during the 11.15 service we were thinking about the 'big questions' we might want to ask God. I realised that one of my big questions is why it's so difficult for most people to discover God's love for them and to make a real relationship with him. Why is it that so many people are pretty indifferent to such a profound and amazing possibility?

I'm still thinking about that. I know we have a part to play, by helping people see what our faith means to us, and our Lent meetings might help us there. But this image of being salt reminds us that even though the numbers who go to church and live out a Christian faith may be relatively

small, God can still use us to make a big difference in the world.

When we look at the news at the moment, we may feel like despairing. We may not like the way some things are going, and we may feel that we can't make a difference. But remember the saltpot.

The other day our son Ben was feeling a bit like this. He volunteers for a charity called Foodcycle. They collect surplus food from Morrisons and other shops, and use it to cook a fresh meal for those who might otherwise not have one. Ben's Foodcycle Hub is in Aston, and it's been going well - 20 to 30 people from a variety of backgrounds and with a variety of needs coming together each Sunday to be given a welcome and a lovely meal.

But on this particular day Ben had just seen some worrying news about the economy struggling in the future, and he was thinking about how this might affect people like his Foodcycle community. What's the point, he asked, in spending all this time volunteering, when this is going to have a far greater negative effect on these people's lives?

I wanted to encourage him. I think projects like his make a difference not just because of the practical help they give but because they change what people call the 'narrative'. The narrative - the story we tell about ourselves - might be this: everyone is out for themselves, we look after number

one, we're suspicious of people who are different, and we don't have time to help the unfortunates.

But Ben's Foodcycle project tells a different story - there are people willing to give up their precious time to help others, it is possible to make a community out of very diverse individuals, there is enough to provide for the needs of those who are struggling, and every individual matters - including the elderly, the lonely and the troubled.

The number of people helped may not be huge, but a different story is being told - and as that story is shared, so new possibilities ripple out into the wider society. It doesn't have to be this way: 'get what I can and keep it' - it can be another way: 'give what I can and share it'.

I think that's a pretty good thing! I wonder if you can think of other people like Ben who help to tell a different, more positive story through the things that they do or the way that they live? People in our community... maybe in your family.. or in the wider world.

You might have heard of Malala Yousafzai or watched the film about her life - she's only 19 now! - but at the age of 12 she started telling a different story to the one told by the Taliban in her part of Pakistan - a story which they tried and failed to suppress. After they had attempted to assassinate her, she was called to speak to the United Nations. She said this:

'The terrorists thought they would change my aims and stop my ambitions, but nothing changed in my life except this: weakness, fear and hopelessness died. Strength, power and courage was born ... I am not against anyone, neither am I here to speak in terms of personal revenge against the Taliban or any other terrorist group. I'm here to speak up for the right of education for every child.'

That's a powerful story! Malala is an example of the power of one person acting with courage and integrity and being willing to face the cost of their action. Being salt for the world.

That's not the same as lots of people having a go on social media at the political leader they don't like. I'm not sure that's really changing the story - it might be more like telling a different version of the same story of division and hatred. What would it mean to be like salt if you were marching with thousands of women against the policies of Donald Trump? Maybe then it would mean being the one who refused to join in with all the jokes and comments which make him out to be just a monster...

Mind you, Facebook can be a good medium for changing the story. Brigid from our Asylum Seekers Support Group put on a post on Friday asking for baby clothes and other items and already the Wolverhampton NCT group has responded with lots to pass on to families who are desperately short. In the face of the travel ban in the US, that action and response tells a different story about

offering hospitality and care to outsiders - the sort of story that God wants to tell through us.

One other simple way to change some of the stories being told in the world, is through a simple email message that I get every fortnight called Justice Mail. It's sent out by some Christians in Birmingham. They choose campaigns to support through different charities - maybe an online petition to sign, or a letter to write. I send it on already to a few people from church - if you would like to get it put your email address on the list on the table by the font or let me know.

Going back to salt, I wonder if you know how salt is made? I have here some salt - and it's not just any salt - it's Hebridean sea salt - peat smoked - from the shores of the remote Scottish island of Lewis. Oooo!

It says it's 'harvested using the simplest of recipes; Hebridean sea water, heat, and time.' To get salt you usually need heat and time. Sometimes it's salt water drying up in huge salt pans on the coasts of hot countries. Sometimes the drying up happened long in the past, and now the salt has been compressed into rock salt that can be mined.

There's something there about a concentration of flavour - that's what makes salt salty! So what about us - if we want to make a difference? The Christian flavour in our lives can become rather diluted. We're so busy - we have some

many things going on in our heads - our focus is in so many places - that really distinctive part of who we are is not very obvious. We become rather bland. We don't really make a difference. It can happen to us as individuals, and as churches.

Maybe what we need is to spend time exposed to the heat and light of God's Spirit - allowing him to evaporate away, as it were, some of the unimportant things which we fill our lives with and our hearts with, to produce a more concentrated flavour of the life and love of God. Lent might be a good time for that.

Think for a moment of the different parts of your life - the places you go, the people you meet, the relationships you have, the community you belong to - the wider culture you are part of...

If Jesus came along, like John and Greg, and tasted all of that, would he say that it is well seasoned? Is our presence making a difference?

Lord, may our lives be full of the flavour of your compassion and your truth, your justice and your grace, your love and your life. May we be salt for your world. Amen.