

- Isaiah 58:1-9a, [9b-12]
- 1 Corinthians 2:1-12, [13-16]
- Matthew 5:13-20
- Psalm 112:1-9, (10)

So here we are in the fifth season of Epiphany when we pay particular attention to all the ways that we are called to manifest Christ's light in the world; Jesus gives us another metaphor: be like salt. And I will admit that it took me some time to catch on to this one because I had always assumed that Jesus was using the expression "salt of the earth" in the same way that I'd always heard it in everyday life – a nice compliment referring to people who are earnest and hardworking, reliable, down to earth, Episcopalians.

So when I heard this gospel though it never really struck me as anything particularly remarkable. Be honest, down to earth, be good people. Okay, that's nice, but it didn't ever strike me as anything uniquely Christian. There are lots of people that I might describe that way. I'm sure you can too. I had neighbors in San Diego who I would call salt of the earth. My grandparents come to mind.

But a few years ago my understanding of this changed a little bit. After our twin girls were born, my husband Joe and I discovered that our best quality time really wasn't happening on the date nights that we had scheduled. It was happening in our own kitchen while cooking. We'd get the girls off to bed, pour a glass of wine or two, put on some good music, and have a little adult conversation. And we would reconnect and talk about our day while we chopped vegetables and sautéed onions. I actually got to love it so much that we started to subscribe to one of those services that mail you everything you need in a box, right? All the ingredients, all the supposedly fresh vegetables, all the instructions, the recipe. And I really enjoyed it because it caused you to cook things you never would have otherwise cooked, use ingredients you would never normally buy, and actually learn some of the basic techniques of cooking that I never managed to pick up in my fraternity days.

One of which is a good chef, I am told, always tastes their food as they go. You taste it as you layer in the flavors, seeing what's missing, what needs to be added, adjusting it just right. And as I learned this technique, I started to really appreciate the role that salt plays in a super great dish. I'm just assuming I wrote this sermon when I was hungry, I don't know. But salt really doesn't have flavor on its own, does it? Salt brings out the flavor of the other ingredients. And, of course, too much can ruin a dish, can give us high blood pressure. But

just enough can make all the difference between something that is rather ordinary and turn it into something extraordinary.

I think that is closer to what Jesus is trying to get at with this metaphor. It's not that we are simply to be earnest, down-to-earth people, but like salt, we are called to draw out the flavors of the world. To be a people who enhance the ordinary moments of life, and with God's help, make them into something truly extraordinary. And at the risk of more food analogies here, bear with me, notice He uses salt in His metaphor. Of all the seasonings He could have chosen, you know, be like paprika, be like pepper, be like garlic, or one of my favorites, truffle oil. All wonderful seasonings, I use them all the time. But notice as wonderful as they are what they do, they add flavor to the dish, right? They put something new on top of the food. And they're the first things you notice when you take a bite, right? Garlic chicken, what's the first thing you notice when you take a bite? Garlic. Salt on the other hand doesn't want the spotlight. When used properly it brings out the other flavors to let them shine.

So what might that look like for us? I think being salt in the world means taking time to listen, to be fully present to the world around us, to really pay attention to what God has already put on our plate so that we can be alert, so we can be open to those moments when we can bring forth the beauty and the grace and the love of God which is already out there.

And that's the beauty of this metaphor. We don't have to bring God to the world. God is already out there. The love of God is already in the world wherever we look. As salt and light, our job is to help bring it out, to shine a light on it, to wake people up to the image of God that is already within everyone that we will meet. Saint Irenaeus, one of the great church patriarch from the 2nd century, he basically said it all when he said, "The Glory of God is the human being fully alive."

As salt of the earth, our job is to reclaim that life, to lift up the humanity of others, to free them from the baggage and the self-doubt and the disconnection that the world tries so hard to bury us under. To help people feel more alive and in so doing come alive ourselves. It also means we don't have to have some big plan. We don't need to have things our way. We don't need to be experts. We don't need a big study. We don't need to have a strategic plan all the time. We just have to take what's been given to us. We just need to be presented to it and show up. Show up to the everyday brokenness of our communities, of our neighborhoods, of our workplaces, of our families. Show up and draw out the Kingdom of God in the midst of that suffering or that Injustice or that sadness.

It also means that as the people of God, we cannot be a people who hunker down in beautiful buildings and hide behind stained glass windows. We can't be a people who seek refuge

from the world. If we are to be the salt and the light, we have to go to the world. We have to engage with it, to be intertwined with it, to be wedded to it. It's only then that we can add value to it, that we can enrich it, and bless it, and tease out the Glory of God from within it. We have to show up.

This very morning nearly a hundred members of this church are showing up at St. Stephen Methodist Episcopal, one of Detroit's great historic Black churches. They invited Father Bill to preach and they invited the rest of us to worship with them, and then stay for lunch. What's going to happen? What's our big plan? I don't think any of us know. All we know is that a historic Black church in the inner city of Detroit invited us and we're showing up. We're going to show up and see what God is up to. We're going to show up and see what the Holy Spirit has in mind. We're going to show up and see what happens when the people of God from two very different contexts get together, and see what relationships are formed, what connections get made, what conversations are going to happen over lunch, what will be the imagination swirling about on the bus on the drive back. We're showing up today so that together our two communities might draw out a little more of the flavor of God's love than we could ever do on our own.

That's, to me, what it means to be salt and light in the world. We don't need to be in control. We don't have to have a big plan. We need to be like the disciples in the Gospel of Luke. Do you remember that one where Jesus sends the 70 out two-by-two. And what does he say to bring with you? Nothing. Go empty handed. Travel lightly. Leave all your baggage behind. Leave your agendas behind. Leave your church pamphlets. Leave your flyers about your next big event. Leave all that behind and just show up. Be a humble presence in their midst. Live off their hospitality. Build relationship and listen and see what the Spirit of God is up to, and then see if you might spot an opening where we could join with it and together tease out a glimpse of the Kingdom of God.

I had a call last night that was just such an opportunity for me. Last year we had a lunch and learn here at Christchurch and Desmond Funeral Homes was with us and they gave this presentation. I was listening and I heard them make one little side comment that I'm not so sure everyone caught. But he mentioned how Desmond has been asked by the City to bury people who have been abandoned, who have no family, who have no friends, who sometimes don't always have a name. They're sometimes homeless people. They're sometimes veterans.

When I heard this, my heart just broke and I thought what a wonderful thing to do. So the next time that I saw one of the Desmond brothers here at Christ Church, I went over to him and I said, that is such a blessing that you're offering to this community, taking care of those

who have been forgotten. And I bet you no one knows they're even doing that. And he said thank you and we got to talking. We got to share our mutual belief that how we treat people after they die says something about how we value life.

And as we talked and I listened, something opened up. A little holy imagination got sparked. I said, you know, what if people from Christ Church Cranbrook, what if we were to go to those burials that you're doing and offer some prayers? What if we did a little service for them? And he loved the idea. So last night he called me and he said, "Tomorrow Chris, we're burying a veteran at Great Lakes Memorial who had no one with him at the end of his life. So we're going to give him a burial, one that was befitting the life he gave for his country, and for a moment remind ourselves of his precious humanity that the world tried so hard to forget."

How can you be the salt of the earth in your context, in your neighborhood, in your place of work, and your family? How can we – by being present to what is already going on around us. Maybe it's a co-worker going through a divorce. Maybe it's a neighbor in the midst of financial troubles. Maybe it's that widow who lives down the street with few friends. What are the little openings in the world around you that are waiting for you to bring forth a little glimpse of the Kingdom of God?

As we go through those doors this morning, where is God calling you to show up? Where will your light break forth like the dawn?

Amen.

[End of Recording]