

Sermon 04/05 January 2017 Welcome at God's Table [but maybe not at mine]

This weekend's readings are rich with encouragements that we **be** the people of God we are blessed to be. That we practice righteousness, share our bread, bring in the homeless, cover the naked, so our light will shine before others, and the glory will be God's.

Matthew says that even if we are salt, or even if we are this light, we can be compromised. Our salt can lose its saltiness. Our light can be squandered, or wasted by being closed-up inside our own echo chambers.

Last week at a conference in Los Angeles, I was listening to my colleagues discuss this week's readings. What does it mean to be salt? And it was so interesting to hear where they took the lessons for their various parishes across the country.

My friend Paul, who is hosting a conversation in California this weekend about the "Spirituality of Resistance," insists that it's a reference to how ovens in Jesus' time were made out of clay. Earthenware ovens. And to kick-up the heat in an earth-oven you add salt. It is a catalyst for heat. So Father Paul will teach that being salty means we are the catalysts. We are to accelerate and clarify the prophetic voice of God towards the arc of justice.

My friend Tallie will teach her congregation in Virginia that there were lots of impurities in ancient salts, so when what was on your table was so diluted with ingredients that were not salt – you tossed it out. It no longer salts. We should be focused, and less distracted. Not diluted by so many other things – busy schedules, multiple self-help attempts to get our lives together, being pulled in so many directions by so much other stuff, we lack clear discipleship. So Mother Tallie will teach that to be salty Christians, this morning's Gospel compels us to study scripture, pray with each other, purify our hearts so we can do good works in God's name with clarity and conviction.

My friend Greg is a gardener and pastor in Florida. He says that he doesn't believe Jesus told his followers they are salt and light. He believes Jesus said the rest – that we are to be **like salt**. And to be **like light** that is seen by others - but Jesus had to remind his followers over and over again that they are not privileged on this earth. They will not be singled out for any favors, titles, or special treatment. In fact, they will be persecuted for his name's sake. And besides, says Brother Greg, when you put salt in soil beyond a certain point, it kills it. So why would Jesus say that we are the salt of the earth?

Eugene Peterson's translation in the Message Bible says "You are here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness?"

And I can't help but wonder if you have known salt in an entirely different context, or witnessed the various harvesting, mining, gathering and refining processes of salt that brings yet another layer of understanding to what this statement of Jesus might be about.

I also think about what that looks like, in whatever way being salt means to us, when we leave St. Timothy's. When we step out into the world. We go out to repair the breach. To be the people who restore the streets. We support and pray for our members who showed up at the Pro-Life march earlier

this year, at the Women's March, at the inauguration celebration, at the Black Lives Matter events, and sit at the booth at the Pride Festivals extending God's love to all who seek to be closer to God and God's people. Asking for God's continued grace, protection and blessing in all of these complicated conversations.

I think of this communion table, how it is wide enough for all of us, and for all of these conversations.

Then I think of our not-quite-as-wide tables in our gathering spaces, the parish halls, and the private tables in our homes. That's where we admit to one another that these conversations are hard, and uncomfortable. There are, frankly, some people who I wish weren't there. But we all need each other. And, with the encouragement of today's Gospel, we need to give love to, and be open to receive love from, all persons. We need to be steady, and keep going. To be catalysts. To be salient, without overpowering. To show people what Godliness looks like.

While we might not all be invited, welcomed, or embraced, around all of our private tables, we must never send a message that there is anyone - *anyone* - who is not welcome at this table. This table is not ours, it is God's. The invitation is not ours, it is God's.

We are called to be the people of God. To salt this earth and draw out the God-flavors, even and maybe especially when that is uncomfortable. To practice righteousness, share our bread, bring in the homeless, cover the naked, and care for each other – always - so our light will shine before all, and the glory will be God's.

Let's pray. God our lives are in your hands, and for that we give you thanks. *Amen*