

2023.02.05 Sermon maybe

5th Sunday of Epiphany

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“You are salt of the earth, oh people...” So our gospel begins this morning. Or not enough. When I was in grade twelve I went to a Quaker school at the north end of the Kootenay Lake – Argenta Friends School. All the students lived with families and Saturday mornings were work mornings. Splitting wood, cleaning bathrooms, making bread were weekly chores. We each took a turn. The closest stores were too far away for bread-buying and in households where it was common for there to be three to six hungry teenagers making daily lunch sandwiches it took seven loaves to get through the week. If we didn’t know how to bake bread when we arrived we soon learned. Some were better at it than others. Some weeks the bread was enjoyable. Others the bread was... well, bread. Sort of.

One Saturday morning my buddy Sorrel is the bread-maker. To call Sorrel a space cadet is a generous kindness. She gives a whole new meaning to that term. Sure enough, Sorrel has just finished adding all the ingredients to the bowl and is starting to knead the dough where she stops and groans. I look up from the task I’m working on. “What?” She gives me a desperate look – “I forgot the salt.” We both pause and consider a week of sandwiches made from bread that has no salt. It’s a truly horrible thought. “What shall I do!”, she begins to laugh somewhat hysterically. I don’t have a single good idea. Finally she decides to add the salt now, she’ll sprinkle it on and knead it in. Can you imagine the week’s bread? You’re familiar with fudge ripple or caramel ripple ice cream? So just imagine salt ripple bread. It is truly, truly awful! I still remember it, that’s how awful it was.

So we, as salt, have the capacity to be the right intensity of salt for the earth. Or just too much. We can be passive and uninvolved in life – like bread with no salt. Or we can be inedible because we are too salty. Maybe being too salty is like arrogance, a lack of humility, hubris – thinking the earth is our bottomless treasure chest, rather than remembering we are here to steward the earth. We are asked to care for God’s creation – all aspects of it – the natural world around us and the creatures we share this planet with, human and all others. We can have enough salt, enough courage to act, and to remember our actions matter. Our choices make a difference.

Of course we may feel overwhelmed – that the problems and challenges of the planet are too big for any of us as individuals to make a difference. That we are engaged in a losing battle. That it’s all hopeless. The darkness confuses and muddles us. But wait there’s more! Jesus doesn’t only say we are the salt of the earth. He also says “You are the light of the world.” He’s talking about the God-light that is within each one of us, a light that no darkness can quench. Think of the words of Psalm 139:

If I say, ‘Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light around me become night’,
even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

Or in the words of the song about George Fox, that 17th century mystic and founder of Quakerism:

There's an ocean of darkness and I drown in the night
Til I come through the darkness to the ocean of Light
and the Light is forever, and the Light it is free.

We are not alone. And we are not without light. We are not without the gifts we need to turn things around, to heal the wounded places, to mend a broken planet. Each one of us has gifts for that job – one might volunteer with a literacy programme, another with the food bank. Another might organize folk for an Earth Day rally and community action, while another might write a letter-a-day to political decision-makers. We each have unique and powerful gifts. And when we remember we are salt and light, the difference we can make in the world is astounding. And when we remember we are a people acting together “nothing is impossible with God.” It all comes down to remembering that we are made in the image of God and we have that God-light inside us, waiting to be put to good use.

So in the words of Marianne Williamson, remember this: “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that frightens us. We ask ourselves, “Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous?” Actually, who are you not to be! You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn’t serve the world. There’s nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won’t feel insecure around you. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It’s not just in some of us, it is in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

Knowing this, go back out into the world and be salt. Be light. Shine!

Amen.