

Scripture Readings:

Isaiah 58:1-9a  
Matthew 5:13-20

**You are Light**

As I was reading commentaries for this week I came across a blog by Jonathan Shively, here is some of what he wrote. “I remember a number of years ago attending a lecture of a well-known theologian. My seminary classmates and I were looking forward to the excellent intellectual stimulation that surely would be prompted by his speech. No doubt great ideas and provocative insights would fill the evening. In fact, I’m sure that was the case, although that’s not what I remember from the event.

Instead, what I remember is taking a trip to the restroom and crossing paths with our speaker there. Few words were exchanged, but great wisdom was passed on. I witnessed this diminutive-in-stature but large-in-esteem leader pick up the stray paper towels from the floor and put them in the trash can. This small, seemingly insignificant act has stuck with me for several decades now. Witnessing this self-less and common act of service enhanced the credibility of this leader in my eyes. While I already held his theological arguments in high regard, I now held him in regard as well.

One consistent theme throughout our texts this week is that of humble service, the kind of attitude about one’s own position and toward the needs of others that translates into simple acts of service... Servant acts are... the source of light that breaks forth so healing springs forth.

There were certainly larger issues than used paper towels at stake when Jesus said, “In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven,” and when God spoke through Isaiah, saying:

“...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, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly...” (Isaiah 58:5-8)

... Big needs are addressed here: overcoming oppression, establishing justice, responding to homelessness, feeding the hungry, and clothing the naked. God’s not impressed by those who put on a show of religion; rather, God is seeking those whose lives have come under the influence of God.

*Shively continues* So why was it an image of a public figure picking up trash that came to my mind first when I read these passages, and not some great figure like Mother Theresa ...? Perhaps it’s because my upbringing has instilled in me a reading of these texts that insists that big things follow in the way of the smaller things. When we have hearts of service, those hearts trickle over in little things, like picking up a piece of trash, before they pour out in larger, more evident pursuits ...

We know how small the grain of salt is. We know how powerful a spark of light can be in a dark night. And yet it is through these small beginnings that our testimony begins its journey. It is in the small acts that good news is birthed. Through our seemingly inconsequential attention to the simple needs around us we begin to live the Jesus invitation to “let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”<sup>1</sup>

To be honest this is how I see our whole life of faith working, if we follow the commandment to love God and neighbour we will automatically follow the rest of the laws.

I also believe that we are created to be salt and light. This passage is one of blessing more than anything. “Jesus doesn't say, "If you want to become salt and light, do this...." Or, "before I'll call you salt and light, I'll need to see this from you...." Rather, he says both simply and directly, "You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world."<sup>2</sup> If we live how we have created to be we will be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. When we don't live how we are created to be we hurt ourselves and others and therefore do not love God, self and neighbour.

Most of us know the statistics about the relationship of the messages children hear compared to their self-esteem. “Psychologists suggest that for every negative message elementary-aged children hear about themselves, they need to hear ten positive ones to restore their sense of self-esteem to where it had been previously. (Frankly, I don't know if anyone has studied this in groups other than young children, but I suspect that number doubles during adolescence and then recedes to about 10-1 again by adulthood!)

To put it another way, children become what they are named. “Call a child bad long enough, and he or she will believe you and act bad. Call a child (or teen or adult for that matter) worthless or unlovable or shameful, and eventually he or she -- all of us! -- will live into the name we've been assigned. In the same way, call us good or useful, dependable, helpful, or worthwhile, and we will grow into that identity and behavior as well.

Perhaps this is the first easy step as people of faith. What if we honoured one another, thanked one another more, too notice not first of others faults but of their strengths. What if we named those strengths and highlighted their abilities. Then they would begin to flourish.

Do you think those athletes that have been competing in the Olympics listened to people only tell them how bad they were? I don't think so. I think someone must have told them they were great skiers or snowboarders or goalies or skaters or else they would never have made it to the podium, or even the arena for that matter.

Many of us have a hard time believing we are worthy or loveable and find it hard to believe that there is any chance we are salt and light. So I wonder what it would be like for you to start a salt and light list. Take a moment and think about some examples of where God has worked through you to help someone else. Now I recognize this is not easy for us. It is a lot easier for us to think of ways in which others have been salt and light for us, but not where we have been salt and light. But that is the point, if we don't see ourselves as worthy and beautiful creations of the most holy then we won't live like we are, and won't live it for others. You may need to start by

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Shively <http://www.evangelismconnections.org/weeklyreflection/evangelectionary-for-sunday-february-9-2014/>

<sup>2</sup> Lose, David [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org)

thinking where others have been God's light for you but I do want you to think about where you have been God's salt and light too.

Let's be honest, "Some people seem to embody the Sermon on the Mount. They are like table salt giving supper its good flavor. They are warm lamps in the household lighting the dark corners. Sometimes you think they might be angels, disguising themselves in ordinariness... Some are like cities set upon a hill - beacons relaying hope and challenge from hilltop to hilltop - torch to torch, light to light- against the darkness. They lean into the danger of the times in which they live, giving their lives to principles larger than themselves; dissidents, truth-tellers, reformers..."<sup>3</sup>

And yet so many lights have been silenced, so many people who are the salt-of-the-earth have been thrown into darkness and yet we hear stories over and over again of those who can the light even in poverty and want. "Or, for that matter, what blessings of hope and love diminish in any neighborhood in any part of the world for want of necessities of body and mind, soul and spirit?"

This season of Epiphany not only invites us to perceive the Light, but to be the lights to the world, neighborhood to neighborhood, hilltop to hilltop.

May we so be. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.edgeofenclosure.org/epiphany5a.html> Suzanne's Meditation