

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

February 5, 2023



SALT

remembering what's important

by Drew Downs

Ours was not a salt-blindly house. When the food came to the table, we didn't salt it before tasting. You could say it was a somewhat heart healthy home.

So many of the other people around me most of my life have needed to watch their sodium intake. What is communicated is that there is *too much* salt around us and we need to be careful. There is an *abundance* of salt. But that isn't a *neutral* experience of the world.

When we recall that salt continues to be the most essential resource for flavoring and preserving, helping humans survive for thousands of years, this other picture of salt becomes...odd. Distorted.

It is one thing to locate ourselves in a world too reliant on salt. But I'm not sure that's as valuable a message. When Jesus compares us to salt, he's comparing us to something far more valuable than diamonds.

AFTER THE EPIPHANY

2023

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

Spicy

The church isn't known for its innovation. We have a reputation for something closer to the opposite of that. For many, the church, and its focus on tradition, are often seen as an *obstacle* to innovation.

And yet, much of our history was built on deliberately innovative solutions, integrations, adaptations, and evolutions.

It may seem incredible to consider it now, but Martin Luther wrote lyrics to drinking songs, not only to appeal to the people in pubs, but to help people to sing using tunes they already knew. Of course, there were just as many then who rejected this premise as carousing with the wrong sort as would say the same today.

I bring up innovation because we often think of it as being clever, revolutionary, or simply a willingness to change. And then we say, "but, of course, we don't do that." But it is actually par for the course. It is what Christians have done since the time of the apostles and it is part of who we are.

The Anglican tradition was founded on innovation. Henry created a state church, Cranmer wrote a common book for common prayer, and Americans founded an Anglican Church that *wasn't* a state church, but joined an Anglican *Communion*. We are often *more traditional* than most but we have as much *innovation* in our character as any. Which means we don't just know what we're *supposed to do* according to tradition. We tie tradition to our present in ways that respect both.

With love,
Drew

AFTER THE EPIPHANY

2023

FOR SUNDAY

The Fifth Sunday After the Epiphany

February 5, 2023

Collect

Set us free, O God, from the bondage of our sins, and give us the liberty of that abundant life which you have made known to us in your Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Reading

From Matthew 5:13-20

"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."

Reflection

We began Jesus's great sermon last week. This Sermon on the Mount begins with the Beatitudes, a collection of blessings which remind us of God's priority.

The Beatitudes introduce an interesting challenge for us—to see God's blessing where we're used to seeing a curse. Poverty in spirit, loss, timidity, being on the wrong side of the law, forgiveness, innocence, making peace rather than war, and in persecution.

Whether we're willing to admit it or not, the stuff culture favors: like power, prestige, fame, revenge, security: this is often associated with blessing. This is the stuff we say we're blessed with. *I am blessed with a big family* or *I am blessed with a good job*.

AFTER THE EPIPHANY

We never say, *I am blessed with the death of a loved one.*

But the Beatitudes turn the idea of translating present power into a reflection of God's favor and toward a blessedness that comes, not *with* wealth, but *from* poverty. Blessing comes when we are *low*, not when we've done everything right. Blessing responds to a need. Doing things right is just us following commandments.

This sense, of blessings coming to us when we are *soft, vulnerable, and compassionate*, is what begins the Sermon on the Mount. This is what leads Jesus to refer to these crowds as the salt of the earth.

Don't take this as a compliment (though we use it as one—and in the exact wrong way). Because blessing is a *response to lowness*. We are the salt of the earth because we *start* as the means of seasoning the world. Our generosity and proximity to grace. That is what we offer. Love, hope, mercy.

What our culture would have us reject: from softness to naïveté: is precisely what leads to blessing. And if we *lose that*, how can we *be that* for the world?

The gospel passage then concludes with a teaching that challenges us with the same oppositeness *and generosity* as the Beatitudes. Jesus's teaching doesn't *oppose* tradition, but *fulfills* it. With eyes of *generosity and mercy, compassion and gratitude*, and embodied by a life lived as makers of peace who hunger for justice, we are able to embody the commandments and live out the Kin-dom.

While it is easy to suggest that Jesus is attacking the Pharisees and scribes here, that makes little sense given the context. Jesus is simply saying that these groups embody greatness by cultural standards. And the children of God are poor in Spirit. So, to embody the Kin-dom, we live by *its* standards. Which start with those Beatitude blessings.

ST. STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
215 N. 7TH ST TERRE HAUTE IN 47807
812.232.5165

STSTEPHENSTH.ORG
