

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Rev. David Beckmann

RCL: Isaiah 58:1-9a (9b-12); Psalm 112:1-9 (10); 1 Corinthians 2:1-12 (13-16); Matthew 5:13-20
LM: Isaiah 58:7-10; Psalm 112:4-5, 6-7, 8-9; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5; Matthew 5:13-16

At Bread for the World, we use the passage from Isaiah about false and true worship quite often to describe why Christians should be about the business of ending hunger. Piety and praying, by themselves, don't get to the root of God's kingdom of justice and righteousness. God requires action that makes God's reign real: release captives, free oppressed people, feed those who are hungry, house homeless people, provide clothes for those who are naked. God promises to reward charity and justice with God's own guidance, presence and blessing.

The salt and light passage in Matthew is also a call to action. Salt is useless if it doesn't enhance the taste of food, and light does no good unless it lights up the world around it. Faith is useless if it doesn't somehow change the world.

We are called to manifest God's glory by acting for God's kingdom here and now, proclaiming justice and righteousness. For this reason, Christians work to end hunger and poverty, rebuild broken relationships, bring peace and reconciliation, bind up those who are brokenhearted, and support the sick and weak ones among us. In so doing, we can help reveal God's goodness in this world.

Paul reminds the Corinthians that lofty words are not what characterize his preaching, but rather the conviction and wisdom that comes from the Spirit. The Spirit directs us to deploy our gifts, not for self-aggrandizement but rather for service.

Some people are less effective than they might be because they underestimate their gifts and God's intentions for them. In her book *A Return to Love*, Marianne Williamson writes:

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 most 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 does not serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we're liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

God has given every person unique gifts and calls us all to be salt and light for the world. We shouldn't underestimate our gifts but deploy them for God's purposes.

Children's Time [LH] Bring some salt with you and invite one child to hold out a hand, and you

pour salt in it (check first with parents to ensure they agree to this). Ask the child if the salt smells (no) or has an attractive color (no).

Then ask the child to taste it, and point out that salt can dramatically change the taste of soup or other foods. It doesn't take much to make a big difference. Point out that the small things we do to help others and serve God also make a lot of difference.

Musical Suggestions [LH] Gather Us In—GC 744 What is Salt Without Its Flavor?—BP 194 Bring Forth the Kingdom—GC 658 We Utter Our Cry—UMH 439

1. Marianne Williamson, *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of Course of Miracles* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992) 165.