

February 9, 2020 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany  
Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

Isaiah 58:1-9a, Psalm 112, 1 Corinthians 2:1-12  
Matthew 5:13-20

**Grace, light, salt, to you blessed people of God, in the name of Jesus. Amen.**

**On Friday evening, I sat with a circle of young people from our faith community**

and First Congregational—our neighbors across the interstate.

At a time when I am usually getting ready for bed, these 5<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> graders at the youth lock-in had finished epic games of tag and sardines, and we gathered in the sanctuary, on the floor in front of the altar.

One single candle flickered in a box of sand, and as we began we lit our own candles and added them.

The light in this space was dim, but the candles glowed and so did our faces.

We read a portion of this same gospel story from Matthew, the one we just heard.

In *The Message*, a contemporary translation, Jesus' words sound like this:

“Let me tell you why you are here.

You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth...”

“Here's another way to put it:

You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world...

If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you?

I'm putting you on a light stand...—shine!

Keep open house; be generous with your lives...” (pause)

This led to some good discussion about how we are salt, how we are light, and

it led to some profound and moving prayers as we held hands around the circle.

**Last Sunday's reading was the Beatitudes,**

that lovely bit from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's gospel:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are the meek, the hungry, the merciful, the peacemakers.

**There is nary a pause** between those blessed ones we heard about last week, and the very next lines our youth read in the candle light, or that we heard this morning.

Blessed are all these surprising combinations of people.... And then:

You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world

Oh, I know the Lectionary wants us to divide this passage: one Sunday Blessings, the next salt and light.

Dear ones, being the salt, being the light:

this is the way we live so that we can make a space where those gently radical beatitudes are real.

**You are the salt, you are the light.**

It's important to note the You isn't You singular: You \_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_.

This is You plural: You all.

You all are the salt of the earth, bringing out the flavors.

You all are the light of the world, creating a glow—in Jesus' time and ours, that witnesses another way.

**These geeky details can be important, can't they?**

And the verbs? They are present tense.

You all are, now, currently, the salt of the earth.

You all are the light of the world.

Not just in some future reality, but now, in all that today brings.

This is about identity: not about knowing our identity theoretically, but claiming identity, actively, deeply.

You all are the salt, so be it: Be the salt.

You all are the light of the world, so shine: Shine now, keep shining.

**During the ELCA Churchwide Assembly last August**, in Milwaukee, we as the Evangelical Lutheran

Church in America began a two-year stint of celebrating significant milestones.

We're marking the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of women being ordained in our denomination,

and the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the first ordinations for women of color.

We're also marking the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary since the vote in 2009 to change the ELCA policy that precluded the leadership of queer clergy in committed relationships.

Friends, these are big milestones. 50 years-40 years-10 years.

**Cyndi Ganzkow-Wold** is a newer member of our congregation, she's the lector this morning.

When she was 7 years old, Cyndi asked her mom if she could be a pastor when she grew up.

God bless her mom who inquired with their local pastor on the east side of St. Paul.

He suggested this would work, but at that time only in Sweden!

Fast forward some years, some big votes in both the American Lutheran Church (the ALC) and in the Lutheran Church in America (the LCA).

Cyndi was #13: the 13<sup>th</sup> women ordained in our denomination, that was in June of 1977.

**Just because the church bodies had voted**, that didn't make it easy.

Cyndi and her spouse Steve are both pastors.

They were called first to the far northwest corner of South Dakota.

No woman had held this role before her, a clergy couple was a new fangled idea. Later she served in Aberdeen, and then in and around Madison, Wisconsin and Elk River. Cyndi told me that one of the reasons she became a pastor was because, as she put, “I believed what they told me in Sunday School.” Cyndi was called to ordained ministry, that is her way of being the light, being the salt, living Jesus’ love. Whether as a sociology prof or a physician, a musician, a parent, a citizen, we’ve all got our callings, our way of shining Christ’s light.

**I’ve been thinking this week about the bushel basket in today’s gospel.**

That wasn’t about snuffing out the light, blowing it out, but rather covering it up, so it couldn’t be seen. What are your bushel baskets? What covers your light?

Is it looking over your shoulder?

Is it the risk of tension or conflict?

Is it some idealized life, rather than, the real life that we’ve got?

People of God, light doesn’t magically end up under a bushel, but rather bushels are put there, put there to block out the light.

Put there by us—in our fear, our not wanting to be too much.

Put there by others, put there by systems—systems desperately trying to hold on to power, or systems driven by fear or hatred or ideology.

I’m thinking about this week’s newest travel bans, 3 years after the Administration’s first travel bans.

In a statement, our Presiding Bishop, Elizabeth Eaton, wrote against these expanded policies that separate families and keep people in perilous situation.

Simply put, she said: This ban does “not enhance our safety or reflect our vocation as Christians.”

**When I’m honest, I know that the bushel baskets are plentiful.**

In a short time we’ll use a litany of thanksgiving for these anniversary milestones.

With these milestones, I’m aware of both our progress and our limits.

In the litany we’ll name women who have led as pastors in **this** congregation—and there are many, including women of color, including queer identified people.

There is much to celebrate and yet it’s not an easy list to compile.

Their pictures aren’t on the walls of Heritage Hall, for nearly all served as associates.

As we put together the list, we were reminded of other leaders we missed in the bulletin, folks like Pastor Lisa Richardson Engen and Pastor Cindy Crane.

There are many more who were part of the community during seminary and went on to serve the church faithfully in other communities.

There are the retired pastors like Cyndi Ganzkow-Wold and Diane Greve.

There are seminary trained leaders serving as theologians and shining their light, following their calls.

There are students and interns.

There are women who weren't ordained but did that type of work a generation or two before ordinations began, women like Leona Reyelts and Marilyn Preus.

Many times you as a congregation have been a powerful witness in making space, making a way, for people to be light and salt—I'm so grateful for this.

When the bushel baskets could diminish the light—don't do that! Don't let that happen!

**On weeks like this, when it's hard to know how to go on,**

I'm remembering Cyndi's line, "I believed what they told me in Sunday School."

I'd like to pass out the candles and look you in the eye, your faces all glowing and remind you again what Jesus said so clearly:

You are the salt of the earth.

You are the light of the world.

This is the way we live so that we can make a space where the beatitudes are real.

Shine, dear ones, shine with the light of Christ. Amen.

2-9-20

**ADAPTED FOR ULCH FROM AN ELCA RESOURCE**

**+LITANY OF THANKSGIVING**

*In 2019-20, the ELCA celebrates 50 years of Lutheran women being ordained in the United States, 40 years of women of color being ordained, and 10 years of LGBTQIA+ individuals being able to serve freely.*

For the vocations of pastor, deacon, and bishop, for those who lead churches and faith communities, for those whose life work is evangelical witness in word and deed,

**We rejoice and give thanks to God.**

For 50 years of women's ordination in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and its predecessor bodies,

**We rejoice and give thanks to God.**

For the women of color who have been called by God to serve this church,

**We rejoice and give thanks to God.**

For the faithful service of LGBTQIA+ pastors who have enriched this church and for the 10 years since the policy change enabling them to serve publicly out and in partnered relationships.

**We rejoice and give thanks to God.**

For the work of seminary professors and staff, chaplains and administrators, those who work for nonprofits, and those who are retired from paid ministries,

**We rejoice and give thanks to God.**

For those who are discerning a call to serve Christ's church, for those who are in candidacy, and for those in their internship congregations,

**We rejoice and give thanks to God.**

For the witness of Mary Magdalene, the dance of Miriam, the hospitality of Lydia, the prayer of Mary, the discernment of Deborah, the courage of Rahab, and the faithfulness of our biblical foremothers,

**We rejoice and give thanks to God.**

For the witness of women who have been called to lead this church – for Pastor Sue Hedahl, Pastor Judith Mattison, Pastor Marlene Helgemo, Pastor Cindy Crane, Pastor Lisa Richardson Engen, Pastor Kwanza Yu, Pastor Esther Dant, Pastor Barbara Johnson, and Pastor Jen Nagel. For our Bishops, Ann Svennungsen and Elizabeth Eaton. And for others we name aloud at this time...For all these and others who faithfully broke new ground,

**We rejoice and give thanks to God.**

Gracious and living God, we rejoice and give you thanks for your wisdom on display throughout time and place, calling all kinds of people to be witnesses to your grace and power. Guide us, as your people, into welcoming your prophets and teachers among us and hearing Christ's good news through them. With gratitude, we pray.

**Amen.**