

SYNOD ASSEMBLY
June 3-5, 2018

You are the salt of the earth. But, if salt has lost its taste how can its saltiness be restored? It can't, it is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled underfoot

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid! And tell me, who, in their right mind lights a lamp and puts it under a bushel basket? I mean, seriously. They would light the lamp and put it on the lampstand so that light might fill the house. In the same way be the lamp and let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your God who is in heaven.

Note that Jesus says "You are". He doesn't play around with these concepts, rather he speaks straight to them and through them to you and to me. You are! Not, should you want to be or you could think about becoming them or you can get back to me in a few days to let me know your answer. No, he says "YOU ARE!" Seems there is no escaping that reality, is there?

So, how do we live that out as people of God? That's a great question, isn't it? How do we 'flavor' the earth and lives of others with the promise of the Gospel of Christ's death and resurrection and bring light into the darkness present in our current time and place? Let me offer a few suggestions.

On April 12th Donte Robinson and Rashon Nelson asked to use the bathroom at a Starbucks in Philadelphia as they waited for a business meeting, but were told it was for paying customers only. The two men then sat at a table without making a purchase, which many observers have noted is a common occurrence at the franchise's locations. Within minutes of them arriving, a manager called police after the men declined to leave the premises because, they said, they were waiting for their acquaintance.

What ensued was an arrest that made the national and international news as they were handcuffed and led out of the building and into police cars to be taken and processed, all because they were black.

During the time that the police arrived, handcuffed them and led them out of the store, Philadelphia writer Melissa DePino posted a video of Rashon Nelson and Donte Robinson as the Philadelphia police arrested them.

In an interview with Philadelphia's WHYY's Morning Edition host Jennifer Lynn, DePino said their only crime was being black in an America rife with racial bias. It was her video and testimony that brought to greater light the heinous reality of this incident, the arrest and subsequent outrage over what had taken place. She wasn't the only one who spoke up that day, there were others as well.

Perhaps that's a place to start being light and salt, speaking out and up against racism in this country and the incredible amount of damage it has done to countless people. Maybe we might even go further and work to understand the racism inherent in us, come to grips with that, work through it and then stand more closely beside those who live under this oppressive system and walk by their side, defending and protecting them as able. Maybe we even begin to get involved in the conversation about the huge percentage of people of color who disproportionately inhabit our jails and prisons and can't get out because they can't afford the bail and the system just continues to become even more unbearable.

"You are the Light of the World. Let your light shine...."

In a recent editorial in the May 23 Christian Century entitled "Turning our Backs on refugees" I came across these words: "Each refugee 'attempting to come into this country'"

undergoes an investigation by multiple agencies that can take as much as three years. It's generally widows, orphans, and those with medical needs or family connections in the U.S. who are deemed eligible to be resettled. A study by the Cato Institute of all refugees admitted since 2001 found not a single security failure. The report concluded that the chance of a refugee with terrorist sympathies entering the U.S. was one in 29 million."

"You are the light of the World. Let your light shine...."

It doesn't appear to be an option and if truth be told, it's not, it is at the root of who we are and who we are becoming as Children of God in a world that seems, some days, to be growing darker and darker. Jesus calls us to be light and promise and hope. And, he is the light and hope and promise that we are called to show forth.

Note the words of Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians we heard a few moments ago: "For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake." This isn't about us. In fact, it's about as far from us as we can get.

We don't need to come up with the words or language or story. Our responsibility is not to fabricate the narrative of redemption for the world. We are given that story in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for us and for our salvation, and that is the story we are called to share with the world. That is the light we are encouraged to show forth. That is the life that gives us life.

This really begins to get at being Grounded in Christ Jesus, the first of our Four G's we are beginning to live into as the people of God in this place. This story of God's great love for the creation in its entirety is played out across the history of time and into our present day. Its bottom line states that God loved this world so much that God gave God's only begotten so that all who believe in him might not perish, but have eternal life.

There is nothing we can do, say or think that will make us right with God, try as we might, God has done that for us in Christ who is the true light of the world. As the psalmist writes in his words of praise to God, "In your light we see light."

In Christ's life we see the light we are to be. A light that shines in the lives of the dispossessed. A light that shatters the darkness of incivility and hate. Light that brightens the dark corners of lives that have to make simple yet painful decisions as to whether to pay the heat and light bill or cover the cost of necessary medications for one more month, medications that often keep them alive and healthy and able to work three jobs.

We are called to illumine the lives of those who seek shelter from all harm, who flee from war-torn countries where death counts are too high to keep or even think about. Our lights need to shine in the places where food is scarce, medical care non-existent and all hope lost.

Like Jesus we are called to enter the lives of the last, the least and the lost, extending a hand of hope and help where necessary and when needed, of simply being with others as life comes to a close and praying them to eternity.

The list could go on and on and you could add your own to it, I don't claim this to be exhaustive. But what I do claim is that we, in being called to be the light, need to enter into the darkness and places we might never imagined we would go.

During a meeting yesterday morning here in preparation for our work together someone mentioned a Survey Monkey Survey would be posted to allow all of you to reflect on this gathering once it is over and share your concerns and complaints. It was at that moment that I said I think we should put a disclaimer at the top of the survey. This disclaimer is something that my daughter taught me a number of years ago and it has become a part of my thinking process

over the years. Often times I would complain about something simple or stupid and Barb would look at me and say, “Dad, that is such a first world problem. Get over it.”

I did suggest we put at the top of the survey “If this is a first world problem, perhaps it’s time to let it go” but then said I didn’t think that would go over well. I can tell by looking at some of you that I was right on target.

People of God, sent to be salt and light, I would suggest to you that our first world problems often stand in the way of being the light and the salt. It is time to rise above them and to enter into the real problems of this world with all the energy, strength and faith that we can muster.

It is time to stop worrying about furnaces and roofs and wonder instead about faithfulness and reaching out to those in the most desperate need. It is time to step out in true faith and hope and love and be the difference in this world that we so desperately seek. It is time to remember that this is our calling and our ministry and that we can follow through because there was one who was there before us, who lived our life and died our death and was raised by the power of the Almighty God.

It is that same God that calls us and sends us, not on our own, rather the Spirit of this Christ goes with us and our God accompanies us through the valley of the shadow of death, stands with us in the most difficult of moments and carries us to the other side whenever we grow weary and weak.

Trust in him, knowing that it is his light that burns within us, that feeds us and fills us and ultimately lets us be the light in this messed up, hurting world. Be that light. Be bold in your shining. Be strong in your conviction. Be joyful in your sharing.

And, know this. Through the work that you do and the ministry you carry out, others will see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. May it be so among us. Amen.