



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY, FEBRUARY 8, 2026
ISAIAH 58:9A; PSALM 112; 1 CORINTHIANS 2:1-12; MATTHEW 5:13-20

A REVOLUTION OF LOVE

MATTHEW 5:13-20 [*Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. 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. "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."*]

One of my best friends in high school was a guy named Rob. He was brilliant, goofy, and fun. He sat next to me in the tenor section of our school choir. But we really bonded in AP World History when we were slogging through *The Gulag Archipelago: An Experiment in Literary Investigation* by Aleksander Solzhenetsyn.¹ We were tasked to do a presentation on this extensive three volume work that explored the Soviet labor camp system known as the Gulag.

It's a remarkable work but it took us several months just to get through the lengthy text. Our presentation went well but I can now attest that misery does indeed love company.

Rob is now a professor of Conservation Biology at the University of Minnesota. I reconnected with him several years ago and we have stayed in touch. I have been hearing from him much more frequently during the immigration crackdown in Minneapolis. He has been

telling me how much his life has changed in these last few weeks. He's usually a quiet intellectual who is often in the field looking at birds. But now he is a social activist.

Just this week he reminded me of the first lines of Solzhenetsyn's tome, "Every person always has handy a dozen glib little reasons why he is right not to sacrifice himself." I can think of at least a dozen reasons why now is not the right moment to raise my voice, why now is not the right time to defend my neighbor. Solzhenitsyn points to something instinctive in many of us — the propensity to avoid conflict, to keep our heads low, to retreat behind walls available for our own self-preservation.

But then many of us witnessed the killing of Alex Pretti who was helping a woman to her feet after she was thrown to the ground by ICE agents. I don't know if he was planning it, but he sacrificed himself. And then, at a vigil after the death of Renee Good, the Episcopal Bishop of New Hampshire, Robert Herschfeld, told the crowd about instances throughout history when clergy put their lives at risk to protect the vulnerable – including New Hampshire seminary student Jonathan Daniels, who was killed by a sheriff's deputy in Alabama during the civil

rights movement. The bishop went on to say this, "I have told the clergy of the Episcopal Diocese of New Hampshire that we may be entering into that same witness. And I've asked them to get their affairs in order, to make sure they have their wills written, because it may be that now is no longer the time for statements, but for us with our bodies, to stand between the powers of this world and the most vulnerable."ⁱⁱ

And then I got this desperate text from my friend, Rob. "Rich, pray for us. I'm scared." I called him immediately to hear about the things that were frightening him and then I asked, "What is your fear calling you to do?" "**ACT!**" he said. Then he told me about his neighbors and friends who took to the streets in the bitter cold. They delivered food, filmed and documented arrests, organized school patrols to protect children, and raised money for neighbors who were sheltering in place. He went on to say that there didn't seem to be any hesitation in these actions. The moment for hesitation seemed to have come and gone. The glib little reasons for inaction had disappeared.

Rob went on to say, "Make no mistake, things are horrible here but the networks of community relationships

that are emerging and deepening and expanding are beautiful and breathtaking. For me they are a real source of hope for what might be when this occupation ends.”

I must tell you. I was planning to give you a safe and pithy sermon on “salt,” but then I opened the lectionary and the first lines of Isaiah 58 jumped out at me:

***Shout out, do not hold back!
Lift up your voice like a trumpet!*** (Is 58:1)

*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?* (Is 58: 6,7)

While there are many other places where the scriptures counsel silence and even the secret doing of good deeds, this isn’t one of them. If we take this prophetic call to action and couple it with the Gospel for today, then we are to make the light as visible as possible,

to shine in the darkness. The text is clear about what exactly light is, how exactly we should go about shining in the darkness. “They will rise in the darkness as a light,” Psalm 112 says. “Their hearts are steady; they will not be afraid.”

And so, Minneapolis has become the proverbial city on a hill and the events unfolding there cannot be hidden. In the Gospel today, Jesus calls his followers “salt” and “light.” It is not an exhortation or an invitation. It’s a statement of identity. “You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.” Rob and his neighbors are no longer asking themselves in any abstract sense what it means to be salt and to be light or what it means to let their lights shine. There is no time for that. People are being detained unjustly, and some are being killed.

Who is Jesus calling the salt of the earth? It’s us. He spoke about us in the Beatitudes last week. Those who are humble, those who mourn, those who are meek, and those who thirst for what is right. Jesus is not calling the revolutionaries but regular people like me, and you, and my friend, Rob, a nerdy ecology professor.

Salt creates thirst, does it not? The righteous are blessed to thirst for what

is right. They are salty and so they thirst.

And who is Jesus calling the light of the world? It's us. Those who are merciful, those who are pure in heart, those who are peacemakers, and those who receive abuse for standing up for what is right.

Righteousness is a form of light, is it not? The righteous are blessed to show forth purity and peace as they stand up for what is right. They shed light through their actions. And action conquers fear.

So, what are we to do? What are you to do? What am I to do? Only you and God can figure out the specifics given the circumstances of your life. But Jesus tells us. Be what you are. "You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world." Be what you are. Pour yourself out. Do not be afraid. Most importantly,

turn to God for everything. Rely upon God like your life depends upon it. Because it does.

We are being called to revolution. A revolution of love. The prophet reminds us that we don't do this alone. We have each other. We have God. Isaiah says at the end of our reading today.

*Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator shall go before you,
the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.*

*Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say,
Here I am. (Is 58: 8,9)*

Here I am. Here I am.

Amen.

ⁱ Solzhenitsyn, A. (2018). *The gulag archipelago*. Vintage Classics.

ⁱⁱ [NH bishop urges clergy to meet the political moment, and 'make sure they have their wills written' | New Hampshire Public Radio.](#)