

Epiphany 5a: 2/5/17
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From today's psalm:

*"Light shines in the darkness for the upright;
the righteous are merciful and full of compassion."*

"Offered my umbrella to a co-worker."

"Helped my brother by helping find his stuff."

"Brought water and snacks to students taking the SAT."

"Helped free a goat whose head was stuck in a fence."

Some of you may recognize these as "Kindness Confetti", samples of the 275+ acts of kindness generated last fall as part of our 275th anniversary.

We sliced and diced them to spread among the tables for all to enjoy at our Annual Meeting brunch a couple weeks ago.

If I recall, this challenge got off to a slow start.

It turned out just fine,

but maybe we didn't start off explaining it as well as we should.

Maybe we should've used today's gospel:

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

Because what are acts of kindness but concrete ways of making a difference in the world, spicing things up and bringing goodness to light?

It's living out our faith in practical ways --

beginning here on Sunday mornings and

only accelerating when we walk out those doors

and go about our lives throughout the week.

Now salt gets a bit of a bum rap these days, doesn't it?

Too much can raise your blood pressure, for instance.

But that wasn't the issue in Jesus' day.

Sure, it was to flavor food but mostly to preserve it;

it had ritual value in sealing covenants, among other things. Even today, search “uses for salt” on Pinterest and you’ll find everything from repelling fleas to picking up a dropped egg. The point is that salt is *useful*.

The same with light.

It helps keep us from stumbling along the path at night when we’re out camping.

Lets us stay up far later reading than our ancient ancestors would ever imagine.

Light can be beautiful in and of itself, but like salt it’s useful.

Salt and light go *beyond themselves* to serve a larger purpose.

“Picked up litter in someone else’s yard.”

“Donate items to IRIS (Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services).”

“Partner with new kid in gym.”

“Anonymously paid for the breakfast of two Vietnam Vets.”

Today we honor Boy Scouts, particularly the young men and their leaders from Scout Troop 4. I would argue that whatever their religious background, Scouts know a lot about being the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Getting here early before big events to set up tables and chairs, and coming back after the fun’s over to clean up.

Raking our leaves.

Raising funds in the memory of a beloved parishioner and Scoutmaster, Gil Boyd, to aid scouts pursuing higher education.

Tantalizing us with homemade donuts today.

These are just some of their acts of kindness (not even counting Eagle projects!).

And we do appreciate them all.

On the other hand, well, that's just who they are.
Scouts promise to "help other people at all times."
And, with their "outdoor code" and enjoyment of the natural world,
I'm guessing they care for creation at all times too.

Likewise, "salt" and "light" are who we are as Christians.
Jesus is speaking in the plural, meaning all of us.
It's not a hope or a command,
but a simple description of what we're about.

So if it's raining and someone needs an umbrella, we offer ours.
If a goat gets its head stuck in a fence, we pull it out.
If we have an opportunity to thank a veteran for his or her service
at breakfast or anytime, we do.
And if the new kid or anyone feeling outcast needs a friend,
we're there.

In the way we framed our 275 acts of kindness,
we invited mostly micro, small-scale, acts --
each and every one precious in its own way.

But Jesus also taught about being "salt" and "light"
on a macro level,
as citizens whose ultimate allegiance is to the kingdom of heaven.
Jesus lived his life in such a way that
spoke truth to the powers of this world.
By calling us the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world",
he expects us to do the same,
putting us to good use to God's glory
in the larger society as well as in our personal interactions.
And I think this goes for us as Christians, and for Scouts.

So we express our concern for the outdoors – for God's green earth –
not only by picking up trash or raking leaves,
but by advocating for public officials and policies
that protect the natural world.
We "help other people at all times" by reaching out to and
speaking out for those in need – children at risk, the homeless and,

yes, refugees.

Like a good Scout, "Be prepared".

Be prepared to pray, to give, to be informed.

Be prepared to hold our elected officials accountable,

to make ourselves useful,

--always with kindness --

in this big beautiful world God so loves.

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