

Feb. 5, 2023 Partnership Sunday

Pr. Steve

In the name of God, Abba/Imma, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

You are salt of the earth--not Jesus, you. He's turning to us to make it real.

Salt, adding flavor to everything, making it better, right? Or, inside of wounds, that deep cleansing. It stings, it hurts, but it's making you well again.

What good is salt if it becomes insipid? You heard the Children's Time teacher--it's no good. We throw it out. It's worthless.

You are the light of the world. Again, Jesus turning to us. You're the light. Let it shine, let it shine. We're here to illuminate life for all. Live as if we lived in the liberated world. That's what faith is--living as if we are already in a liberated world. Our great friend, Rumi, asked 800 years ago, 'Oh, my friends, oh my friends. Of all the places to fall asleep, why did you choose a prison?' Whew.

Our world, oh the efficiency, technologically dazzling. Do you know that the global economy nearly benefits (almost) twenty percent of the people on the Earth? Wow! There are social theorists who say that 80%, they were far better off underneath the Babylonians... and the Egyptians, and the Romans. Shall we go back for the sake of our humanity?

It's been said the ideal employee today is economically ambitious, a health nut.

And somebody who's really indifferent to the consequences of their work, to the products they make, and to exploitation. That's how the global economy and individualization work, hand-in-hand. *You don't have to care: 'Will there be water for our grandchildren?' Not my problem.*

How many conversations that we participated in our own lifetimes, over the decades, when we talk about these things, which are so discouraging, and then one of the folks on our group says, '*Yeah, but what can you do about it?*' We've said it ourselves--haven't we? Time and time again. This is what St. Paul calls worldly grief. '*Yeah. I wish something could be. May as well give up.*' It's paralyzing. It shuts us down.

Godly grief, according to St. Paul, stirs alarm and indignation. It motivates us, and urges change.

Knowledge is not power. Oh how we love that, don't we? It's on our commercials now.

Knowledge is not power. It seduces us. It fatigues us. '*You don't know everything yet, do you? What's wrong with you?*' And it habituates us to the prison. '*Just polish the prison a bit more, will you please?*' It doesn't animate us. It doesn't energize us. And it certainly isn't teaching us to enjoy life at its fullest.

Why all the depression and addiction in our world? This is why we need Partners--and we celebrate our Partnership Sunday this week with the friends in Lwamondo, South Africa, and Laurel Galan, Nicaragua, because they know the harshness of life...but their spirits are still alive!

On average, how many Sundays do you sit here and anticipate, *'I can't wait to see how many lively people I meet this week, people filled with the Spirit, with hope and energy? They're going to touch me and transform my life.'* Huh, isn't that sad? *'We're just hoping to get through the week.'* That's how diminished we become.

The people in South Africa and Nicaragua, they are still motivated by sense of love and resistance, and hope, because they have to be, they have to be. Can you imagine being part of a congregation where say upwards of a quarter of the people of spent time in prison? Or had family members disappeared? And what it's like to come together, and worship together--and that community can't give up hope. We're charged with hope to become salt and light.

These friends know far more than the experts on technology. They know far more than the experts on power. They know far more than the experts on death. They're breaking out of prison, and inviting us to join them. They're living in the world as if they're already liberated. They are salt, they are light, and they want more good company.

Some 3,000 years ago, the prophet Isaiah is already saying, "Is this the kind of fast that I want? ...that you feel miserable and contrite and just oh so sad. (You're such a bad person.) Is that what God needs? Is it not to undo the thongs and the yokes, and break people out of prison? And then--this is what so profound—"Then our light will shine," he says, "*and our wounds will be healed over.*"

We have to move beyond the impotence of knowledge, that 'paralysis of analysis' which Martin Luther King identified, that leads to such despair that nothing can be done--because when we say that, and when we hear that, *'Friends, nothing can be done'*, that's violence. That is violence against ourselves, and against one another.

Paul speaks of the strength of the weak--we aren't in control, we don't act like we're in charge. No, we don't have the power. "*But no eye has seen. No ear has heard. No one has imagined, what God has in store for us.*" That's why we keep our focus on the Holy One. The means for doing this--we do every Sunday--the sacraments, prayer, Scripture, community.

In our prayers we don't pray, *'Dear God, protect me from reality'*, (although it is a popular prayer.) Maybe we do..let's try *'Dear God, protect us from reality. Amen.'*

No, we are praying for the courage to face reality, and perhaps to change it sometimes. And to remember that what people call reality is not the last word. It's not.

So, just a couple brief stories about our friends, Tshenuani and Mudzunga Farisani. They are the people who brought us into this relationship in Lwamondo. I first met Tshenu Thanksgiving Eve. He'd made a presentation over in the City. And there, after everyone had left, he and I went on talking for quite some time. And he said, having been imprisoned already three times and tortured, "*You know, if I'm arrested again, I won't come out alive.*" I have never had to say that.

He returned home, and on December 15, he was arrested. But immediately, there was an outpouring. The State Department in those days received twenty thousand letters a day. And 5,000 a day came in demanding Tshenu's release, came from religious spiritual people everywhere, and Amnesty International, demanding his release. And Ronald Reagan, then President, said and I quote, "*Who the hell is this guy? Get him out of there, I'm tired of this.*" And Tshenu's life was spared.

Within just a couple weeks, he got a telegram one day at noontime, which said, '*You are now banished from South Africa. If you are not gone by midnight, there will be consequences.*' He lives five hours from the airport in Johannesburg, twelve hours to get out of the country--three small children. What's to become of the family?

He did his best. Fortunately... he didn't make it there by midnight, but the plane had 'mechanical issues.' (All of the mechanics were black. Some take care of each other) and when he arrived at 4:00 in the morning, the plane worked!!

Tshenu settled here in the Bay Area after spending time in a Torture Recovery Center. He taught at the Seminary [Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary] halftime, then he also worked in the United Nations Human Rights Commission halftime, meeting with people from Tiananmen Square, and all of our friends in Central America—Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador. Nicaragua....Can you imagine those conversations about the state of the world among those who have been tortured, imprisoned...falsely accused? That's Reality. Those are the people to be listened to about how this thing works.

His family received bomb threats. They lived in El Cerrito...here, in this country. Peace became their spiritual home in banishment. And one day, Tshenu was in his office at the Seminary. A fellow steps in, unannounced, says, "*We know what you're doing. We're watching your every move. You must stop these things. We know where your family lives. If you don't, there will be consequences.*"

Tshenu said, "*Who's that on the wall behind you?*"

The guy turned around, looked at the wall. "*It's a crucifix.*"

Tshenu says, '*That's the only guy I listen to. Get out of here.*'

Tshenu's home [in South Africa] (and I'll give you details another time) was literally assaulted by police and soldier units with assault weapons twice. They come crawling through the bushes surrounding and attempting to kill them in the middle of the night. It was foiled.

Ten years after Apartheid ended, Tshenu came to the fellow who was in charge of that unit, he was a lieutenant in this Special Services Group, special training, you know, it covered things like this during the days of apartheid. They also happened to be black. And Tshenu asked this fellow, if you'd be the treasurer for the church body because we need a treasurer. (We need a Treasurer, too, here at Peace. You don't have to have those previous qualifications, but...) This guy said, 'Yes.' And it saved his life, because he'd been dead, and he knew it--but he was brought back to life.

We need all the salt and the light we can get.
Amen.

The peace, which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ
Jesus. Amen.