

FCCS February 7, 2020

Rev. Curran Reichert

“Be Salty”

"Discovering vocation does not mean scrambling toward some prize just beyond my reach but accepting the treasure of true self I already possess. Vocation does not come from a voice 'out there' calling me to be something I am not. It comes from a voice 'in here' calling me to be the person I was born to be, to fulfill the original selfhood given me at birth by God." *Thomas Merton*

These past two weeks, I have tasted the salty goodness being referred to in today's passage from Matthew (5:13-20) and I return to you feeling very encouraged. My time away began on retreat with other pastors living in areas facing, as we do, the prospect of wildfires and flooding as annual events.

Together we explored strategies of care both during and after those experiences. The conversations and sharing validated the fact that it takes a long time to heal from occurrences such as these. One colleague serves in Murphy's, up in Calaveras County, where five years later they are still recovering from wildfires that decimated land, life, and property. Now they face the daunting reality that no company will insure them because they live in an "at risk area."

We went deep together, crying salty healing tears and laughing through the collective pain. We broke bread and shared stories of encouragement. All of this was underwritten by our local Conference, the NCNCUCC, in partnership with the National UCC Disaster Relief Ministries office. If you ever wonder about our connection to the wider church and how those Special UCC offerings go to support others, this is an excellent example of the monies we give becoming light to the world.

Later that week, I attended the Trauma Summit at the Hanna Institute, located at Hannah Boys Center. The Institute was created after the 2017 fires to promote communities of resilience by offering training for trauma informed care to health care providers, social workers, counselors and teachers. Nick Dalton, who sang for us at the Interfaith Thanksgiving service and is former a member of Transcendence Theater Company, is one of the three people leading the Institute and he made it possible for clergy to attend the training at reduced cost. Nick is salty for sure and he shares his light freely. Incidentally he is also a pastor's kid.

There were more than 400 people in attendance for this summit and I will share more of what I learned about the effects of and strategies for healing from trauma in our series during Lent. Watch for information on that in the March newsletter. For now, I will just say that the light that emanated from these open-hearted caring practitioners- many of them under thirty and very diverse- helps me to have hope that there is more goodness in this world that we can see most days. It assured me that there is loads of information and research all around us to help us navigate difficult issues and complex experiences. But we have got to do a better job of reaching across disciplines to share information with one another- we have so much to learn from each other and we are at our saltiest when we are working together for common good.

This morning we hear Jesus telling his followers that they are salt and light, right now, not in some distant future. Jesus is teaching his people about what the Kingdom of God looks like and he is reflecting back to us what we look like within that Kingdom that is both already and the not yet a reality.

We are called to be tasty and lit up, not because the world is as it should be, but because we have a vision for what it can be when we share our best flavors with each other.

Over the weekend, while many of you were here welcoming Bill Hutchinson's granddaughter "Grace" into the family of God, others of us were exploring the invitation offered by the mystics; Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich, and St. Bridget of Ireland. Salty women all, both those we studied at Santa Sabina and those who gathered at Santa Sabina.

The mystics encourage us to be bold and brave in proclaiming our love for God's creation. We heard their voices calling us to trust our intuition, to proclaim our truth and passion for a more verdant and inclusive world view. I can still taste the salt that was stirred up by that gathering.

In fact, I have been thinking that gathering itself is the most powerful way we have of sharing our light, God's light with the world. For no matter how brightly we shine as individuals, it is when we gather for good that our light overshadows despair. Much of the research on trauma resiliency invites us to remember that at our core, our species exists to gather and to create together.

This past week of my study leave was spent at the coast just outside of Watsonville, with three colleagues who serve churches that on the surface look quite different from ours. Mainly they are three times our size and reflect the priorities and particularities of their regions. But the heart of those congregations is the same shape as ours; our congregations care about shining as brightly as we can for the goodness of God's created world.

We took turns talking about current best practices in ministry and sharing our struggles and successes. We prayed, walked on the beach and ate together. We visited until we ran out of words. We listened to the news reports from Washington and the Iowa Primary; the world was churning around us, we wrestled with how to bring words of Good News when the news we confront daily is so dire.

Still the waves outside the window rolled in and they rolled out, the sun came up and the sun went down and came up again the next morning with brilliant displays of color and light reminding us that the world does not belong to us alone. Again, with laughter, tears and truth we bolstered one another's spirits and sent one another back into the great good service of God's people with hope in our hearts and juicy friendships to call upon when the news of the day gets wearisome.

In her book *The Watchman's Rattle*, Rebecca D. Costa writes that there are two indicators that a civilization is on the brink of collapse; the first is political gridlock and the second is that facts are replaced by belief. She has identified patterns of civilizations spiraling into oblivion from the Mayans to the Byzantines sharing one thing in common; human beings reach a cognitive threshold wherein they are no longer able to design solutions to the problems they have created and yet they continue to create problems that are beyond their ability to clean them up. Once that happens, civilizations begin to decline and they pass their problems onto future generations.

The solution depends on our ability to overcome such evolutionary obstacles. "The Mayans lacked the ability to discern the complexity of their circumstances and, therefore, had little possibility of rectifying deteriorating conditions. Instead, they did what every great civilization does when it reaches a cognitive threshold: they simply passed their dangerous

problems from one generation to the next as these problems continued to grow in magnitude and peril.” (page 9)

Neuroscientists have the answer, they suggest we have not two, but three parts of the brain to call upon in order to create solutions to problems; we use the left side of the brain to organize our thoughts (analysis), the right side of our brain to creatively attack a problem (synthesize), but there is a third component part to the brain that allows us to access a cognitive process called insight. This part of the brain is uniquely equipped for solving complex problems.

Remember, I mentioned that we are on this planet to gather in community and create things- well, this part of the brain is where the “create things” part lives and it thrives in situations that are spacious and playful. That is why we think of our best ideas in the shower, or on vacation- because it is in those spaces where no one is expecting anything else of us that we have room to engage a different part of the brain.

Those “Eureka” moments are real and they transpire after we find ourselves in a period of stuck-ness. The term itself comes from the legend of Archimedes, who purportedly had a moment of insight in where else- his bathtub.

The Christian word for it is Epiphany and it happens to be the liturgical season we are in right now, which means you or I might possess the very component needed to solve the worlds most vexing issues, but we the world will never know if we hide our insight under a bushel or if we work ourselves to death so that the intuitive part of the brain has no room to breathe.

Friends, lights do not magically end up under bushels. They get covered up by those who intentionally wish to dim them. This means we have the power to set them free, to shine brightly. In other words, “learned helplessness” is a very real thing and it is something those who follow Jesus are cautioned to avoid, because your voice, your intuition, your insight they matter; they matter to all of us, they matter to the planet, they matter to God.

Let us all go forth to live salty, lit up lives. Amen