

Epiphany 5A  
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During my junior year in college, I decided to learn to make real yeast bread. I can't remember the spark that started it all, but I remember it took a while to master the art. In fact I learned a lot in my first few attempts. I killed the yeast because the water was too hot, and the bread came out flat and dense. I let the dough rise in plastic bag, and because I cut off the air supply and the yeast went through fermentation instead of respiration, and the bread tasted like wine. And once I forgot to knead in the salt. I realized this mistake right before I put the loaves in the oven, but I thought it wouldn't be a big deal. The bread would just be less salty. But I was wrong. The bread had hardly any taste. The flavor was one-dimensional, if that makes sense, no depth, no subtlety, just kinda blah. Bread baking taught me that salt brings out flavor and dimension in food.

So I get that reference that Jesus makes to salt in today's gospel lesson. As followers of Jesus we participate in disordering the status quo and bring out the goodness in one another. Or as Eugene Peterson states it, "*We're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth.*" God-flavors of this earth...that's nice.

But the image that really grabs my attention this morning is the one of light, especially when you look at the science of light. It does make me wonder if Jesus had inside knowledge on centuries of research still to come....

Light is both obvious and mysterious. We are bathed in yellow light from the sun this morning and we will stave off darkness this evening when we flip the wall switch in preparation for the big game. Evidence of light is all around us, ...we see it in an afternoon sunbeam that bounces through the dust particles in the air, ...we can feel it in the warm fur of a pet napping in that same sunbeam... and we benefit from that light in all the food we eat. But what exactly is light?

The simplest definition of light is "visibly perceived radiant energy." And as you probably remembered from high school chemistry, visible light only makes up a small portion of the electromagnetic spectrum. Light we cannot see includes ultraviolet light, x-rays, micro-waves, and radio waves. And all of this light shoots its way across the universe at 300,000 km/sec.

For years scientists couldn't decide if light was a wave or a particle. Because under specific circumstances light will behave like a wave and then in other instances it will behave like a particle. Eventually physicists finally admitted to the duality of light. But it was a tough leap, you know humans, we like one answer, not two. We like things black and white...not that grey space in between.

Perhaps most important to us is that light powers sight. Light reflected from objects to our eyes allows us to see. Of all our senses, sight is the most dominant, controlling and defining how we see and perceive the world. But you know the really wild part of sight...? It is

impossible to prove that any two people see a given object in exactly the same way. I am looking down at this brown lectern and I know it is brown. In my childhood I was taught about colors. My eyes and my brain have a long relationship of working together, identifying and describing the world around me, so I know this color is brown. And the same could be said for each one of you. You all know this color to be brown. However, there is no way to tell if we each are seeing **exactly** the same color. There is no science to discover this. My eyes, my brain, my color interpretation. Pretty wild, right?

Light is unique, and multidimensional, and powerful, and mysterious. It makes so much sense that Jesus chose this image to describe the movement of God in the world through the active lives of his followers.

Yet for some reason, in the past whenever I have read today's gospel lesson with the image of a light on a hill and not under a basket, I have imagined only one type of light: bold and bright and neon. As followers of Jesus we are to ring out the gospel truth at the top of our lungs at every opportunity. Anything less and we're falling short of the command given us. I don't know about you, but that expectation feels more like a straight jacket than a life giving opportunity.

But here's the thing, just as light is varied and multidimensional, so too is God's conversation with us. Every now and then we get those beautiful unmistakable neon signs that say "Kate go HERE" or "Kate do THIS." And they're wonderful when they happen. But more often than not God's light comes to us in softer 40 watt ways...in the gentle nudging of a friend, the peace of an afternoon walk or a prayer that captures exactly what I feel.

In today's lesson Jesus calls us to be a light on hill and share the love we know. But it is important for us to remember that this call is embedded with flexibility and variety. How we share the light of Christ can be as varied as the collection of DNA in this room. We can choose to be floodlight bold or candle light soft, and anything in between. There's no wrong way. Because when it is really dark even the smallest of light makes a difference.

We had a tragedy at Kent School last week. A student died by suicide. Every death is sad, and suicide even more so, but this particular student was so known, so loved, and so much a part of all life on campus that everyone felt the pain of loss. No corner of the community was left untouched. It was heartbreaking. In a matter of hours a mind numbing darkness and bone-crushing sorrow flooded into our world. The temptation to pull back into the safety of a dark inner room was real.

But light found a way. At the end of the long dark hallway we saw a sliver of light seeping under the door. We found something to walk toward and love crept into our lives. But here's the thing, light didn't come cascading into the community in one big rush, instead hope broke into the darkness through a thousand small flickers of love and compassion. The deans ordered pizza for all the dorms one evening so the students would get out of their rooms and talk to one another. Teachers canceled classes so students could find their humanity again by coloring and knitting and building puzzles. Students planned a candlelight vigil where musicians played, choral groups sang and everyone cried. Dorm

parents hosted slumber parties. Counselors listened and gave out hugs, lots and lots of hugs. We opened our hearts to the pain, yes, but also to love and healing. Through a hundred different interactions, love found a way. And you know what? On Thursday, 5 days after the suicide, I heard laughter again.

The light of Jesus is powerful and mysterious; it is the spark that burns within us all. Furthermore it is a light we are called to share. Because you know what? The only way God's love and compassion can find its way into the broken world is through you and me. We are his hands, his feet, his heart in the darkness. That's pretty powerful stuff when you really think about it. God's got a whole lot riding on us and our ability to love.

But don't let that responsibility stress you out. Because all God wants from us is transparency to the light within. And there are so many options... Be a vocal unrelenting advocate for refugees, make a meal for the hungry, hug the heartbroken, house the homeless, pray for the poor in spirit, care for creation, love our neighbor in Exeter and in Cuba. Open your heart; it is as easy and difficult as that.

You see God knows that the littlest bit of light makes a difference in the dark. Each one of us doing our part to help love find a way.