

SUNDAY by SUNDAY

Place a vigil light and a small bowl of salt (or a salt shaker) beside an open bible in the center of your group. Have each person light a vigil light, darken the room, and pass around a salt shaker, so each can take a few grains of salt. Feel the roughness of the salt and taste it. Pray together.

LEADER: A disciple is one who preserves the gospel of Jesus Christ by living it.

ALL: *May this salt remind us to preserve Jesus' word in our hearts and live his good news in our actions.*

LEADER: A disciple is one who lets the light of Christ shine.

ALL: *May we let our light shine.*

Turn on the lights.

This Sunday Jesus preaches two simple imperatives: to be salt of the earth and let our lights shine.

When I moved to Waipahu, Oahu, Hawaii, to volunteer after college, I quickly became aware that I had grown up in a cultural bubble. The Asian people opened my mind to the delicious variety of human beings and my ignorance of their cultures. Then I moved back to the mainland (or the Big Island of Round Eyes as Hawaiians refer to it) and applied for a teaching position in an African American community.

To prepare, I took a six-week program in African American cultures at Martin Center (now Martin University) in Indianapolis. For the first time in my life, all my professors and a majority of my classmates were Black. I heard stories of life in the United States from a nonwhite perspective. I had to face the reality of racism and how I, as a white person, profited from what anti-racism activist Peggy McIntosh calls “the invisible knapsack of privilege.”

The first weekend I went swimming with my classmates and developed a severe earache in each ear. I was in such pain that I could not attend class but stayed in the dorm reading the books that were assigned for the session. Looking back, I think my ears ached from hearing the pain that our culture inflicts on the people whom I was beginning to know.

The six weeks at Martin Center blessed me. I realized I had grown up in and live in a culture that is racist. I did not choose to become racist, and it is not possible for me to lose the privileges that I have as a white person. But I can become and choose to be a more conscious person.

Today another sister and I live in Ferguson, Missouri, the town where a police officer shot 18-year-old Michael Brown and put the concerns of the Black community in the headlines. Ferguson is 69% Black, 20% below the poverty line. Houses are easy to rent. We are choosing to make folks in Ferguson part of our lives, and we part of theirs.

● **What choices do you make to resist racism you witness or experience? To resist privilege?**



GOSPEL



Jesus calls us to be salt and light.

NARRATOR: Jesus continues speaking to his disciples.

JESUS: You are the salt of the earth, but what if salt loses its flavor? How can you restore its flavor? Then it is no good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

JESUS 2: You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bushel



basket. The place for a lamp is on a stand where it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see goodness in your acts and give praise to your Father in heaven.

Matthew 5:13-16

All are precious in God's sight.

As Jesus, whom Matthew sees as the new Moses, teaches his disciples in Sunday's gospel, he compares them to salt and light. Today every cook has a salt shaker near the stove and every table has a salt shaker for those who want saltier food.

Two thousand years ago, people had no refrigeration. People who survived on fish had to eat them immediately after catching them. Hunters had to eat meat as soon as they killed an animal. Salt became a precious commodity because it allowed fish and meat to be dried and cured and thus last a long time.

Salt's ability to preserve food is a foundation of a new level of civilization. The process of curing food eliminated dependence on its seasonal availability and allowed food to travel and be traded.

However, salt was difficult to obtain and consequently a highly valued trade item. At the time of Jesus, the Romans controlled all salt production in their empire. The Latin word for salt is *salarium*. Roman soldiers received *salarium* as payment for their work. Salt was their salary.

Although the Romans treat the Jews as worthless discards of society, Jesus encourages his disciples to realize their preciousness in God's sight. Jesus builds up the confidence of his disciples by telling them that they are valuable. He encourages them to be fully human and preserve society from the moral decay perpetuated by the occupying Roman forces. By comparing his disciples to salt, he drew on their knowledge and understanding of the importance of salt in healing, cleaning, and curing.

● Who affirms you are worth your salt?

● Who values your gifts for discipleship, for continuing Jesus' mission?

Jesus also compares his disciples to light. People made lamps in Jesus' day from clay. These simple lamps had a reservoir for olive oil and a lip or nozzle on which a flax wick rested. Household lamps were small enough for those in the family to carry them in the palms of their hands. To get the most illumination, a family set a lamp on a stand.

Roman rule kept Jewish people subjugated with little hope of being full, active human beings. Jesus encourages his disciples to be like lamps in the darkness. He challenges them to stand tall and share their illumination with others.

As disciples Jesus calls us, too, to be counter-cultural to all in our society that dehumanizes ourselves and others. Jesus' sermon on the mountain collects practical sayings for living as Jesus' disciples. Kind, gracious, generous, respectful actions toward others invite the same in return. We are to illuminate our society.

● What light shines in your actions?

● What impedes your light from shining?

Reuters



What will restore Israel?

Jesus would have grown up hearing Sunday's first reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah, who preached in the mid-700s before Christ. Isaiah protested against an aristocracy that ignored people who were homeless, naked, oppressed. Civil rights worker Fannie Lou Hamer was a prophetic voice in the tradition of Isaiah.

Ms. Hamer was born in Mississippi, the granddaughter of slaves. Her family were sharecroppers—a position not that different from slavery. In 1962, when Ms. Hamer was 44 years old, she attended a voter registration meeting. To her surprise she learned that African Americans actually had a constitutional right to vote.

When asked by the meeting facilitators for volunteers to go to the courthouse to register to vote, Ms. Hamer was the first to raise her hand. She made a dangerous decision. “The only thing they could do to me was to kill me,” she reflected later, “and it seemed like they’d been trying to do that a little bit at a time ever since I could remember.”

When Ms. Hamer and others went to the courthouse, the police jailed and beat them. Ms. Hamer’s courageous act got her and her family thrown off the plantation where they were sharecroppers. Receiving constant death threats and

Elie Wiesel was born in 1928 in what is now called Romania. At 15, the Nazis deported his family to the death camp in Auschwitz. His mother and younger sister perished; he and his two older sisters survived. Elie and his father were later transported to Buchenwald, where his father died shortly before the camp was liberated in April 1945. Wiesel’s book *Night* is a memoir of his imprisonment.

In his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech in 1986, Wiesel suggests a way to let our light shine: “As long as one dissident is in prison, our freedom will not be true. As

long as one child is hungry, our life will be filled with anguish and shame.

“What all these victims need above all is to know that they are not alone; that we are not forgetting them, that when their voices are stifled we shall lend them ours, that while their freedom depends on ours, the quality of our freedom depends on theirs.” Wiesel counsels us that “there may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest.”

● **Share a story from your experience of protesting injustice.**

DO SOMETHING

CHARITY

JUSTICE

- Attend an event celebrating African American History month.
- Visit the new Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC, when you can.
- Read *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* by Isabel Wilkerson and her earlier book *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*.
- Eat or worship with communities outside your cultural bubble.



even being shot at did not discourage Ms. Hamer. She became a Field Secretary for the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and traveled around the country speaking and registering people to vote.

Ms. Hamer understood that voting was the first step to securing a decent life for people living in poverty. "I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired," she often said. She answered to no one except God. Her rallying song of non-cooperation with systems that violated her was "This little light of mine, I'm going to make it shine."

Ms. Hamer understood the call of Isaiah. She worked to remove the yoke of segregation, pointed her finger at what was wrong, and addressed the evil inherent in a system that kept people hungry and homeless. She knew how to let her little light shine.

Acts of mercy will restore Isreal.

Thus says the Holy One: Is it not time to share your bread with the hungry, bring the homeless into your house;

clothe the naked when you see them, and not turn your back on your own?

Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your wound shall quickly be healed; your vindicator will go before you, the glory of the Holy One shall be your rearguard.

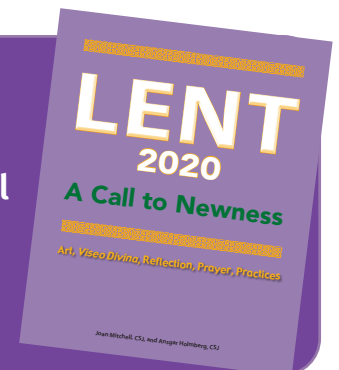
Then you shall call, and the Holy One will answer; you shall cry for help, and God will say, "Here I am." If you remove oppression, false accusation, and malicious speech from among you, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and the gloom shall become for you like midday.

Isaiah 58:7-10

- Who has inspired you by the way they make their light shine?
- How has doing acts of mercy affected your life?

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PRAY

Shut the lights off and sit with only the vigil lights burning. First, take a moment to remember people in your life that led you to know the light of Christ. Then, share one name out loud.

LEADER: Jesus, you call your disciples salt of the earth.

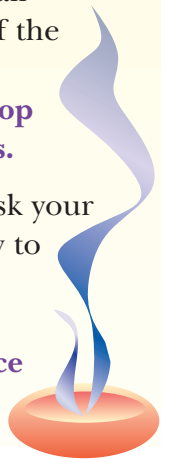
ALL: May we never lose our taste for your word.

LEADER: Jesus, you call your disciples light of the world.

ALL: May we never stop illuminating darkness.

LEADER: Jesus, you ask your disciples to give glory to God by our works.

ALL: May our works reflect God's presence in the world.



Nancy Corcoran, CSJ, holds a Masters in Theological Studies from Harvard Divinity School. She has studied at Xavier University's Institute for Black Catholic Studies, the Mexican American Cultural Center, and Dar al Islam. She has served as a chaplain in Chicago and Boston and now works with the Ministerial Alliance in Ferguson, Missouri.

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