**5 Epiphany, Feb. 9, 2014; Is 58:1-9; Ps 112:1-10; 1 Cor 2:1-12;Matt 5:13-20; Rev Mary S Trainor**

My son gave his nephew a special stuffed toy that talks -- it was not a teddy bear, it was not a doggie or a ducky, no -- it was a stuffed piece of bacon that says, **"I'm bacon. I'm bacon**." It is called "My first bacon" and it's soft, red and white, with a friendly set of eyes. My two year old grandson loves it, and loves bacon too. My family, when we think of yummy salty foods, we think of bacon. When we have a family gathering I always need to cook up a pile of bacon for breakfast. Salty foods seem to satisfy some craving in us. This past week, I visited with former parishioner Bill Weinmann in the King Veterans Home. Bill used to cook at the supper club owned by Marlene and Henry;Bill knows good cooking. When I asked Bill about how the food was at the Veterans Home, he said "**oh, it all begins to taste the same after a while, there is no flavor, they can't add salt because so many of us are on low salt diets**."

Salt is more than a flavor enhancer; it is essential for our bodies (we are about 0.4% salt). Salt in biblical times was much more than a salt saltshaker for better flavor; in fact, salt made the difference between life and death. Sodium Chloride, or table salt, is an antibacterial agent; salt at high concentrations causes microorganisms that cause infection to die. It is a preservative; it keeps food from being spoiled by mold growth. Have you ever heard of the saying, "**like rubbing salt in a wound"** and wondered where that came from? When you rub salt into a wound it hurts, but this is not just about being mean - it actually involves healing. Today, in our Gospel, Jesus says, "***You are the salt of the earth***." This is not just some fun, casual statement -- this is a life or death statement. It speaks to our identity and calling as Christians to give life to others. Jesus is telling us that the world needs the essential message that He brings, and we are the salt shaker -- we are to be the ones to distribute the message.

For the past several weeks, our readings have focused on the identity of Jesus - but today our scripture readings turn to our identity. They are about Jesus working in us. Our readings today together weave a lovely, but challenging, tapestry: they all fit together to give us a unified message about who we are to be in the world, as followers of Jesus? We are to be ***salt*** of and ***light*** to the world. We have talked a lot recently about how Christ's light is to be reflected to others through us, in ordinary ways in our daily lives. People who are the salt and light of Christ are different than those who aren't, and people should be able to quickly know the difference. But oh dear, George Barna tells us this is not so. Barna is the CEO of The Barna Group, which studies the religious beliefs and behavior of Americans. Barna’s recent research revealed, **“… the average Christian in the average church is almost indistinguishable from the rest of society**.” This is because we hidden our lamps "***under the bushel basket***" and not lived salty lives; we do not truly live as Christ's followers.

At the end of this Gospel passage, Jesus talks about ***"righteousness***." Righteousness is a fancy word that means being right with God, being morally good to God. We can't be righteous by trying hard or by doing good works, because no matter how we try or how good we are we can never be good enough. It is only Christ who makes things right for us, and He did this through the cross. Our righteousness comes from God's action, and not our's. So, being salt and light is about letting God work through us, from the inside out. We have Christ within us, and that drives what we do on the outside. Most people nowadays live life from the outside in; i.e., most of our moods and actions are based upon our external circumstances. But, as Christians, we are called to live from the inside: to have our moods and actions based upon our interior life with Christ. Paul talks about this today in our Epistle from 1st Corinthians when he says: "***But we have the mind of Christ***." This means that we are so close to God, that we begin to automatically have our thoughts and actions driven by Christ. The more time we spend with Jesus, the better we get to know Him, and the better we can hear God. Living from the inside out is living out of the mind of Christ. God does this inside us when we let Him, and when we do we can't help but be ***salt*** and ***light*** to those around us.

I have sewed all my life, beginning in Home Ec class in middle school. When you sew garments or quilts, you spend lots of time focused on the reverse side of the fabric -- it is the side that no one sees. when you make a pillowcase or some kinds of quilts, you work on the inside of the fabric and then right near the end you turn it inside out. If a problem occurs in the sewing on the inside, this is revealed on the outside. We live from the inside out too; what goes on inside of us is revealed on the outside. Jesus said, "***You are the light of the world;***" the world can only experience Christ's light from you if it comes from inside of you.

St. Teresa of Avila spoke of this referring to the place in her soul where she experienced true, full communion with God as the "**interior castle**." This is where her identity and Christ's identity are close. We can experience this "interior castle" as well through prayer and the receiving of Christ's real presence in Holy Eucharist. We take Jesus into ourselves, and absorb His holiness, His power in the process. This is not a fleeting moment that happens on Sundays at church; this can be a way of life, your way of life: the way of life Christ is calling each us to live today.

When we with the mind of Christ from the interior castle, we lighten up the lives of others and serve as preservatives just by the way we are. And this even includes reaching out those who are not like us, those who have been marginalized -- in Isaiah's words: ***"..the oppressed... the hungry...the homeless poor... the naked***." And if we do, Isaiah says, "***Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly***." Our Psalm 112 echoes this, "***Happy are they who have given to the poor."*** When we live from the inside out, from the place of communion with God, His Light and salt will guide our lives and we shall experience a deeper relationship with God, a deeper sense of value, a deeper love. This is the "**abundant life**" that we prayed for in our opening prayer this morning - found in our relationship with Christ.

When we leave this place to “**Go in peace to love and serve the Lord,”** we go as forgiven, loved, empowered people with abundant lives who live from the inside out reaching out in the Name of Christ. Amen.