

I heard a delightful tale recently. It brought a smile to my face.

A grandmother was trying to teach her grandson, Tommy, some table manners. After a few lessons, he said, "Grandma. You said I should always eat my pie with a fork when I am invited out to dinner. Is that right?"

The grandmother replied with pride, "Why, yes, that's absolutely right Tommy!"

"Well," said Tommy, "would you happen to have a piece of pie that I could practice on?"

I like that. I believe that we could all use a little practice, especially if pie is involved. In some ways, I think our scripture for today is all about practice. ***In this scripture, Jesus speaks not only to his disciples but also to any of us who would aspire to be his followers today.***

"Let me tell you why you're here. You're here to be salt. Seasoning that brings out the God flavors of this earth . . . Here's another way to put it. You're here to be light. Bringing out the God colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this . . ."

You're here to be salt . . . to bring meaning to this world. You're here to be light . . . to bring hope to this world. That is who you and I are called to be. Yet it is not easy is it?

We live in a world where we can easily forget who we are and why we are here. We live in a world that has given us September 11th, a world where we are on alert for terrorists who seek to destroy us.

We live in a world with four dollar a gallon gasoline. It has gone up so fast it has seemed dizzying and out of control. It affects every decision many make from purchasing groceries to making plans for vacations to figuring out what new way we might have to get to work.

We live in a world that has produced company collapses like Enron. We have seen leaders of companies and countries live with a callousness and an uncaring that is simply unconscionable. While lives of workers and people within societies are being destroyed and thrown away.

We live in a world where tsunamis and earthquakes and hurricanes destroy communities and lives. We live in a world where people are murdered and communities as well as families feel fear.

This is the world we live in. It is a world of tragedy. It is a world of pain. It is a world of loneliness. No wonder we sometimes forget who we are. We can get so caught up in worry.

Maybe that is why Jesus reminds us, "*You are to be salt . . . You are to be light. . . You are to be a city on a hill.*" You and me, we are called to be examples to practice living with hope and life in a world that is hurting.

John Ruskin lived back in the days when English Villages were lighted by lamps along the street. One evening, he watched with a friend as a lamplighter moved slowly on a distant hill, lighting the lamps along the street. Ruskin said, "*There, that is what we are supposed to do as Christians. We are to punch holes in the darkness with the light of Christ.*"

God wants to work through you and me to touch a hurting world. Do you see the pain around you? Are you willing to let God

work through you? Are you willing to punch holes in the darkness with the light of Christ? Are you willing to go public for God?

In our community, there are people who are out of work. Have you been praying for them? Are you finding ways to reach out to them and let them know you care about them? Is there some way you might be able to help out?

In our community, there are children struggling to find an adult who loves them. Have you been praying for them? Would you be willing to care for them? Would you be willing to tutor them?

In our community, there are people who feel emptiness within. There are people who feel lonely. Are you willing to take a chance to visit and talk? Are you willing to offer them the hope you have in Christ?

In our community, there are people struggling with diseases like cancer, and depression. Would you be willing to spend time with them? Would you be willing to offer friendship for them?

You are to be salt . . . You are to be light . . . You are to be a city on a hill. It's time to go public with our love for God in a world that is hurting. Are you willing? Because your willingness can make a difference for God and for this world.

Shortly after September 11, 2001's terrorist attacks, two bricks with handwritten notes filled with crude, racist remarks were hurled through the front window of the Old Town Islamic Bookstore in Alexandria, Virginia. Store manager Hazim Barakat was angry and frazzled. The Palestinian immigrant also was unprepared for what happened next.

About 15 bouquets of flowers and more than 50 cards - some with money - arrived at his story. People from as far away as

Tennessee and Nebraska called with condolences. A local businessman, who would not give Barakat his name, paid for a new window. Christian ministers dropped by to express their support.

"The people in the neighborhood were so nice, you just wouldn't believe it," said Barakat. "This is like another family I have. This is my new, big family. I want to thank everybody."

The people who responded punched holes in the darkness with the light of Christ. They were salt. They were light. They practiced living their faith. And that is who we are called to be. And that is what we are called to do.

"Grandma, is there another piece of pie I can practice on?"

May God help us to live, so that others can see God living in us.

Amen