Spiritual Savor

Dt. 6:6-9; Mt. 5:13-14

13 "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men.

14 "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. 15 Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

There is a moral intensity to Jesus' suggestion that salt that loses it's saltiness is worthless. He was originally talking about keeping your moral purpose in a time of great trial. That is important, but most of us are getting worn out at the moment by a low-grade aggida that threatens to diminish our meaning.

I was struck this week, flipping through the TV channels, looking for some news, and I just turned the TV off. I realized that nothing I was watching was actually news, just rage, right-wing rage or left-wing rage.

The other side is full of hypocrisy. They don't get it. Can you believe it? What is wrong with these people?

When I was a child, Cable TV had not been invented. Back then you had the choice between the very reasonable Walter Cronkite or the very

reasonable Chet Huntley and David Brinkley. My kids grew up with the very reasonable choice between Robin McNeil and Jim Lehrer on NPR.

Today, the first shows in the morning start in partisan rancor and the last shows at night end with partisan rancor. We are ginning up our anger, our outrage. I sat there thinking of George Orwell's Novel 1984. Every morning, Big Brother would have the masses assemble in a great movie theater where they would depict the Enemy of the Day on the big screen, and people would engage in "two minutes of hate".

Orwell said, "The horrible thing about the Two Minutes Hate was not that one was obliged to act a part, but that it was impossible to avoid joining in. Within thirty seconds, any pretense was always unnecessary. A hideous ecstasy of fear and vindictiveness, a desire to kill, to torture, to smash faces in with a sledgehammer, seemed to flow through the whole group of people like an electric current, turning one even against one's will into a grimacing, screaming lunatic. And yet the rage that one felt was an abstract, undirected emotion which could be switched from one object to another like the flame of a blowtorch."

The two minutes of hate cultivated a really negative spiritual ethos. These people would then go to their jobs, where they would encounter the ordinary frustrations that we all encounter- bureaucratic compliance that we find more than annoying, legal blockades from people that just can't get to 'yes', long lines, or other inefficiencies because management is just pathetic.

At any given moment, they could turbocharge ordinary annoyance with this subterranean sea of emotion and blow up over seemingly nothing. The society that Orwell describes is full of people who are personally miserable, in fear, living out of their negative emotions, on edge, not fulfilled. And unable to fulfill the people around them that they would normally like to love. They are isolated, ruminating, vindictive, perpetually keeping score of the offenses they have endured, miserly with their compassion and affection.

I remember reading that book in college, thinking, "Who would ever willingly put up with such a miserable way of being in the world?" And last week, I realized we are letting the lowest common denominator lead in our wider world in our media.

I wonder how many of you are starting to feel miserable yourselves? We are cultivating a spiritually toxic ethos. Add to that your legitimate fears, anxieties, worries. Next thing you know, you are wondering to yourself whether much of anything you are doing is worth doing. You are flat, cynical, dyspeptic, and hostile.

You need a spiritual antidote. You need a spiritual discipline to structure your life internally to access your Higher Self, to access your positive spiritual energy. Because this is not you. You are more. You are deeper.

My kids sent me photos from their wedding on their anniversary with all the flowers. It came back to me with full emotional memory.

You are looking forward to this wonderful wedding, but for a year prior to that, you have to deal with finances and tastes with your in-laws, whom you don't really know all that well.

"They want chartreuse tablecloths on the tables? Where do you find chartreuse tablecloths?" You watch your own daughter morph into Bridezilla: "Daddy, what do you think about having our wedding in Machu

Picchu?" (You mean like Peru; I was thinking Summit would be just fine). You have vendors that you contract with that go out of business. You have a thousand little items that come up, right up to the morning of the wedding, right up to 5 minutes before the wedding.

And you could let this anxiety take over your life if you don't watch it, right up to the last payment as the florist drops off her bill. "Oh, my God!!! How much are we paying for these flowers?"

But then there comes this moment, after the party has started, great food, good wine… The lights go down, and we remember how the bride and groom grew up and eventually met each other. All of these images from the past, some of them you don't even really remember anymore.

The beach, vacation, graduate school… My kids were so little. I was so young. My wife was so full of can-do optimism. The crying and the fighting aren't in this batch of photos. It looks like we got along pretty well. I've forgotten more than I remember about way back when, but I remember being very happy when we were together.

What a blessing it was. I loved Kate. She loved me. We loved our children. What a wonderful family we were. And now, all of those little kids are grown, and they all have their own families. And time is moving on.

The seasons of life are changing. Looking around the room, the older generation is almost all gone now. I'm just about the oldest person in the room.

And suddenly I'm filled with this deep sadness about the beauty of our lives together. I'm watching all this change, and for a moment, I just wish I could hold onto time. I just wish I could capture this because our lives are fleeting.

But we can't hold onto time. We can't go back. But this is what is really real in our lives. This is what is the most meaningful part of why we live, what we look back on, what makes it worth getting up every morning and starting again.

We are taking a moment, with family and friends, to stop and 'Savor', to remember, to call to mind in gratitude. Spiritually, this is what puts saltiness in the salt of our lives. Spiritually, this is what gives our lives that

zest. It is not the stuff in our lives, all the cool crap that we own. All that is leased. You can watch it come and go with the styles of each passing decade.

It is our people, the people we were privileged to live our lives with, the people we were privileged to learn how to love, the people who helped us grow up, the people who stayed with us through our mistakes and helped prune our character so that we grow into people worth being around.

In a moment, we are just deeply, emotionally grateful. We are grateful to have been born, grateful to be alive. Maybe we achieved a lot in this life, maybe not. But as Louis Armstrong sang, “What a Wonderful World” it has been.

Gratitude is our soul pointing us towards what is important.

In the endearing movie “Jerry Maguire”, Jerry has his big moment. He closes the biggest deal of his career after much frustration and heartache. His phone rings. He answers it with abandon and excitement, ready to share the good news of his accomplishment with someone. But it is not his wife calling him; it is the wife of the football player that he represents, who can’t

wait to connect with her husband about the same deal. She just wants to connect with her husband in joy and gratitude and celebration.

Jerry has an instant when he realizes he has no one to celebrate with. He may be incredibly accomplished in his job, but He hasn't cultivated a community, a family. He doesn't have any people. In a moment, he realizes that he has missed the spiritual point of his own life. And he starts running, running, running all the way to the airport, all the way home from LA to New York because he finally gets it about what is important in his life. He finally remembers not just what is important but ***who*** is important, who is it that will actually care, that we share our lives with.

Are you walking around in your life, filled up with cynicism and a low-grade anger that bubbles up to the surface of your life all too easily? Are you slowly losing your zest? I hope you have the chance to zoom out in these last couple of weeks of summer, early in the morning or in the quiet of the evening sky. I hope you can see your life in perspective and remember who is important, who makes your life go.

I hope that you can ‘Savor’ spiritually. Find what you are grateful for. Call it to mind. Name it. Remember who you are grateful for. May your scarcity wound become healed with the fullness of love that surrounds you. May your subconscious anxiety and worry be surrounded by the goodness of laughter and lightness that you can bring back into focus. May the demons that you are not worthy of love be transcended by recalling moments when you were cherished, plain and simple. May the curse of loneliness that afflicts your soul be surrounded with the voices of laughter from the past, memories of tenderness, humor, and forgiveness. May the past well up within you to point you towards your real future self, full of spiritual abundance. May you tap into the stream of grace that surrounds you and sustains you, and may you be at peace with who you really are.

But really, how much did we pay for those flowers?

Elie Wiesel once said that you could summarize the Hebrew scriptures in one word: “Remember.” “Remember that you were once slaves. Remember that God liberated you and brought you to a new land.

Remember the wilderness in your life. Remember God's steadfast love that you have known through specific acts of grace. Dwell on these to invoke your gratitude. So in Deuteronomy 6 we read, "My commandments I place on your heart. Teach them to your children when you lie down and when you wake up. Bind them on your hands as a sign. Write them on the doorposts of your house, so you remember what God has done for you."