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Fifth Sunday, Feb 9, 2020

Because Lent and Easter are later this year, we have the opportunity to reflect on more of the Sermon on the Mount (even though we skipped the Beatitudes last week because of celebration the Presentation). Perhaps in the next few weeks, you would find it helpful to read prayerfully the entire text, chapters 5, 6, and 7 in Matthew's gospel. This sermon serves as the keynote address in Matthew's gospel. We hear Jesus the teacher. For Matthew's community Jesus was Wisdom Incarnate, and so much of the Sermon is rooted in the Jewish wisdom tradition. In this tradition, the questions continually asked were these: Is the life of wisdom and righteousness really worth the effort? Will God ultimately vindicate the just? Can one meet persecution and even death with the hope that one's destiny is in God's hands? (See Arthur Dewey's *The Word in Time*). In today's passage, salt and light are used as symbols of wisdom.

In the first reading, from the unknown prophet we call Third Isaiah who lived in the desolate Jerusalem after the return from exile, we hear the wisdom of salt and light being expressed in very concrete terms—and very challenging ones as we contemplate our world today. Direct aid and social and political structures are religious concerns.

The second reading continues our proclamation of Paul's correspondence with the Corinthians. He too speaks of authentic wisdom—the work of God.

Let's listen to God's word!

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Jesus' wisdom in the Sermon on the Mount turns values, visions, and

expectations upside down. What then does it mean to be salt and light in the reign of God?

Just as a beginning of a response, we may want to reflect on what really are our wisdom sources. What grounds our lives and directs our everyday decisions? We are here, desiring to live our lives according to the Gospel. But there is so much competition! We get so many contradictory messages about what's really important in life. From advertising and television (just think about the ads last week for the Super Bowl and their costs), from movies and music, from business and politics. We receive messages that value things over people, messages that promote individualism and consumerism. We encounter structures and decisions that support authoritarian power rather than authentic leadership, structures and decisions that increase fear and alienation and in so many ways contradict the consistent ethic of life. And all these can subtly shape our day-to-day lives.

The Scriptures, especially this Sermon on the Mount, offer a countercultural vision; often they seem to make no sense. Yet, Isaiah speaks very concretely; Paul invites discernment. And Jesus calls us to compassion and fidelity, to justice and reconciliation, to non-violence and love. Here are salt and light.

What are your wisdom sources—really?