

[Readings: Isaiah 58:7-10; Psalm 112; 1 Cor. 2:1-5; Matt. 5:13-16]

Once upon a time, there was a mother mouse who decided to teach her children about the world. So she gathered all of her little mice and set out for a walk. They walked down the hall and turned to the right. Then they went down the hall and took another right. And suddenly they found themselves in front of the family cat dozing in the sunlight. The mother mouse was scared. But she didn't want to give in to her fright. Just as she was about to get past the cat, the cat's eyes popped open and the cat raised its paw.

The little mice were petrified. What would their mother do? Well, just as the cat's paw started to come down, that mother mouse looked the cat right in the eye and started barking like a dog. And do you know what? The cat was so startled and frightened that it jumped up and ran away! The mother mouse, wiped her brow, shook a little and then turned to her little mice and said, "Children, I hope you learned a valuable lesson. Sometimes it's good to know a second language!"

It's the same way with us. It's good to know a second language. Salt and light are the language of God; the language of Grace; the language of hope and love. And when this language is translated into action it becomes the most beautiful language ever spoken. We're called to be salt and light and to speak the language of God as we live our faith. We're called to live the Word.

Things are better when we take care of one another. Things grow worse if we don't. That is nowhere truer than in today's Scripture readings and in our families. Loving and purposeful families grow together and yield abundant dividends in loyalty, mutual encouragement, and assured welfare. Careless, neglectful, or abusive families reap sorrow and hostility that winds through the years and spreads the malignancy further.

What's true for families is true for communities. Communities that care for their weaker members thrive in peace and well-being. Communities cut off from the fate of their disadvantaged ones will harvest division, unrest, and violence.

Follow this simple formula through a single nation, or to all nations – even ours -- and its truthfulness continues. Hebrew prophecy proposed an answer as simple as the problem: Share your bread. Shelter your homeless. Clothe the naked. Don't turn your back on your own. Watch your speech. The nation that cares for its afflicted will be a beacon to the world. And woe to the nation that doesn't. It's as simple as that.

This weekend, we have present members of the Stephen Ministry, who provide a listening ear and Christian compassion to those who are going through spiritually trying times. We also honor Boy Scout Sunday, and the good example and work they provide for our community.

Jesus is also a fan of simplicity. We would find our hearts curiously free of obstacles to becoming the people we want to be, happy and fulfilled. If we love, if we forgive and if we serve. We would also supply the salt to our communities so that everyone around us would lead richer lives simply because they know us, harvest our love, and are illumined by our example. When we live in the light and become the light ourselves, we discover our true purpose.

Saint Paul understood that when he made his startling resolution to keep his gospel plain and simple. He stayed close to the cross.

Isaiah says that if we feed the hungry and shelter the oppressed, our light shall break forth like the dawn, God will hear us, and our wounds will be healed. Who in this congregation each Sunday isn't presented with some kind of wound of mind, heart, or body? Isaiah's point is openness and participation in God's generous love, moving us to generosity and to justice, and brings us healing.

"One night at the end of a special Saturday night worship service," writes Warren Hudson of Ontario, Canada, "a thunderstorm unleashed a bolt of lightning that plunged the church into darkness." With the congregation seated in total darkness, the pastor found some candles and handed out the candles to everyone present.

Persons lit their candles in much the same way as many churches do on Christmas Eve, each person lighting the candle of the person next to them. The

worshippers then made their way through the church's winding hallways to the front door.

"Peering out, we could see the rain coming down in sheets," Warren remembers. With traffic snarled, people were running for the nearest shelter.

Looking around, they realized that the entire city was in darkness. "There in the darkness we stood," Warren writes, "a little band of Christians, each clutching a light, not sure whether to venture out into the storm or to stay inside the church, in hopes that the storm would soon blow over."

There in the darkness, the light of truth struck him. In this most dramatic way he realized what it means to be the "light of the world."

He writes, "It occurred to me then that this is the temptation I face every day. It is easy to play it safe and be a good Christian in church. It is a lot harder to venture out in faith into the storms of the world."

May we never fail to carry our light – the light of faith, the light of hope, the light of loving service – here in this sacred space, and then, with courage and determination, into the darkness of the world. AMEN!