

WEST CENTER CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

The Pastor's Portion *Spiritual Nourishment for the Soul*

February 9, 2020

I was born with a dream inside of me. So were you. We were designed to dream the epic life God created for us—the abundant life, the fully human, **fully alive life** that Jesus lived. Somewhere along the way, we stopped dreaming. We went from having big dreams about how we would have influence and change the world, to settling and buying into the lie that we could not make a difference. As you meditate, remember your childhood or young adult dreams. Dream anew in this time. Your fellow congregants finished this sentence by writing: **I dream of a church community that:**

- ✚ Reaches out and delivers help to all
- ✚ Continues to become more modern in philosophical practicality
- ✚ Thrives and is vibrant
- ✚ Is larger
- ✚ Works together in harmony and peace
- ✚ A church beyond feeling relief, when giving relief to the needy is required
- ✚ Not just accepting but supporting the LGBTQ community
- ✚ Loves God and each other, that works together for the good of the church and each other
- ✚ That allows me to be my authentic self.

HOW WILL YOU FINISH THIS SENTENCE? E MAIL ME YOUR RESPONSES!

**Adapted from Leading Change, Jim Harrington & Trisha Taylor*

**RESUMING ON
FEBRUARY2:**

**DEVOTION AND SILENT
MEDITATION 10:45-
11:00AM**

**1:00 pm COFFEE
&CONVERSATION WITH
PASTOR KRIS**

**An informal Study of the
Lord's prayer. A time to
share and ask questions.**



West Center Church seeks to worship the Living God, being Led by the Holy Spirit to carry on the work of Jesus in justice, peace simplicity and unity.

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See our February Church Calendar attached.

Weekly Inspiration: The Wisdom of Howard Thurman:

“Don't ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive, and go do that, because what the world needs is people who have come alive.”

“The basic fact is that Christianity as it was born in the mind of this Jewish thinker and teacher appears as a technique of survival for the oppressed. **That it became, through the intervening years, a religion of the powerful and the dominant, used sometimes as an instrument of oppression, must not tempt us into believing that it was thus in the mind and life of Jesus.** 'In him was life; and the life was the light of men.' Wherever his spirit appears, the oppressed gather fresh courage; for he announced the good news that fear, hypocrisy, and hatred, the three hounds of hell that track the trail of the disinherited, need have no dominion over them.”

“There is something in every one of you that waits and listens for the sound of the genuine in yourself. It is the only true guide you will ever have.”

Pastor Kris' sermon: February 9, 2020: SALT AND LIGHT
Matthew 5:13-20

¹³ "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under-foot.

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵ No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

The Message bible reads like this: ¹³ **"Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You've lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage.**

¹⁴⁻¹⁶ **"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, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.**

As we continue in our sermon series on the Essential teaching of Jesus, let me remind you that the Sermon on the Mount is set at or near the beginning of Jesus' ministry. He has been on the scene, drawing large crowds because he was healing and feeding and ministering to the least, the lost, the lonely. Those under Roman occupation: the oppressed and depressed. And when Jesus saw the crowds, he climbed a hill to begin to teach them. Those who were anxious to know more about him, those who were hungry for the living word, climbed the hill to sit at his feet. Now, this alone should remind us that in order **to follow** Jesus, not just come to church, not just come to coffee hour, but if you really want to FOLLOW JESUS, you will have to put in some effort to learn his teaching, to learn what he needs and desires of you as disciples of Christ.

And I daresay it is not to just fellowship with one another, it is not to just come in the church one day a week, and tend to the business of the church, it is to study his word and participate in his redemptive work. Jesus is talking to those people who had the energy, the faith, and the desire to learn from him.

Last year at the Annual Meeting of the NY Conference, the UCC president and general minister John Dorhauer was there in our midst where he was called to preach and teach. And he said something that stayed with me to this day, a question that I want to pose to you today: **What aspect of the gospel would be missing would be absent, would NOT be expressed, if West Center Church were to close its doors? In fact, let's make it personal: What aspect of the gospel message would be lost if you lost your faith, if you decided to be an atheist and renounce your faith?** I want you to think about that as we move forward to study the Essential teachings of Jesus

Author Charles L Quarles points out that Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount with the pronouncements of the blessing on His disciples before He placed demands on them, and that is significant. This order suggests that the righteousness described in the sermon means that he is not saying you will be blessed IF you are salt and light and your righteousness exceeds the Pharrisees, he is saying that it is BECAUSE YOU ARE BLESSED THAT you can be salt and light.

So, let's look a bit at salt and light: What exactly does this mean, and what would it have meant in that time? Well, you have to ask yourselves what is the purpose of salt? Salt had at least 11 different uses in ancient times. The Bible directly refers to several of these uses and assumes others. Salt was a condiment to give flavor, salt was also a preservative. Without refrigeration meat could quickly spoil. Spoilage was prevented by curing the meat with salt. The salt killed the bacteria responsible for spoilage.

The Bible mentions that a lasting covenant was made by eating bread and salt or salt alone (Num 18:19; 2 Chr 13:5). Because of the use of salt in sealing a lasting covenant, eating salt with someone was a sign of loyalty. The Bible frequently refers to salt as an agent of purification. Like snow and bleached wool (Isa 1:18), salt probably became a symbol for purity because of its white color. Salt was added to sacrifices both to symbolize the lasting nature of God's covenant with His people (Lev 2:13) and to purify the offering. Exodus 30:35 says that the incense offering was to be "seasoned with salt, pure and holy."

Let's talk about being a seasoning: Salt seasons and flavors food. So, we as the disciples are called to keep things from being stale and flat and tasteless. We are called to spice up life, to make it flavorful and interesting. There is nothing worse than a lack luster disciple who is not passionate about their faith. The God we serve is dynamic and active and ever evolving, and we are called to be the same. You know the old saying: If you always do what you've always done, you will always get what you've always gotten? Well that goes doubly true for churches. Many churches don't want anything to change, just get better...and not just churches but people in general. They think they can operate the same way as they sit and watch people leave the church, watch their lives devolve into a boring sameness of drudgery, watch people come in the church but never come back, and then they wonder why nothing is getting better, or they do the same routine every day and never expose themselves to new and interesting opportunities. They are not growing, and neither is the church universal.

Many churches are stuck. Stuck in the past, stuck on the money, stuck on the way things used to be instead of the way things ought to be. Stuck on tradition rather than truth, stuck on dogma rather discipleship, stuck on customs instead of Christ... JUST STUCK!

But we are called to be salt, and salt flavors, but it also irritates. Ever pour salt into a wound? We are called to irritate the world that is inured to injustice, desensitized to depravity, a world that ignores the elderly, and the cries of babies in cages at the border, and the cries of children lacking clean water, or adequate food to eat. We are called to be full of flavor, full of zest so that we can season this sin sick world. We are called to be irritants to the ways of injustice and indifference. We are called!

But how can we season this sin sick world if we just stay safely behind our closed doors and our gorgeous stained-glass windows? How can we be a light to the world if we hide our love and our light under a bucket? We can't.

The reading from the message bible, really captures my vision for how **we** can be salt and light and be the church here at West Center. The message bible puts it this way: **Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.**

You know, in many churches...well, in the Baptist church that I came out of, they would OPEN THE DOORS OF THE CHURCH immediately after the sermon was preached, I think I told you about that. Opening the doors of the church was the invitation to discipleship. It was a sign of hospitality: This is our house, where we serve God, and we do it in community with each other...would you like to join us in the service to God?

Everyone would get excited at this prospect of welcoming new members, and the congregation would stand to its feet to allow people in the pews to pass through if they wanted to join and to encourage them to join. And I am here to tell you that when I went there in 2006 there were 350 people, and to date that church now has about 8-10,000 members. But it's not about the numbers, it is about the spirit of welcome, the invitation to join, the open doors of the church, the willingness to serve, the excitement to learn and to serve, the investment of time and talent and treasure. This is what it means to be the light and the salt.

We should be happy and passionate about inviting people to come here to see the treasure we have and the treasure we are in this community. We are a light that should not be put under a bucket. We are a light that shines, and even if it seems that the light pales in comparison to the evil in the world, we must nevertheless continue to shine knowing that even a flicker of light will bring hope to a dying world/ I want us to shine so brightly that we shine throughout Bronxville, Yonkers, White Plains, and the world. The light we have is the light of God. The light we have represents the love of God. Jesus said: if I be lifted up, I will draw all men to me! I believe that!

If we pray, if we believe, if we have faith, if we lift up Jesus, if we are salt and light, we can make a difference in this world. This is our calling: to make our community a better place because we are in it, to make things spiritually better in this community through the demonstration of our saltiness and our love and our light. And do not get discouraged because God is on our side! We have the love and the power, and the protection of God and we cannot go wrong!

I am inspired by the writing of Apostle Paul in the letter to the Romans: He says: Romans 8:³¹ What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³² He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? ...In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

If we have the love of God in us, if we know that we can never be separated from the love of God... if we decide that we indeed will be salt and light and be the true disciples we are called to be to flavor the world, purify the world, preserve the world and even irritate the world, then together we can be that salt and that light, we will drive out the darkness and despair of loneliness, isolation, addiction, violence and hatred. This is our calling. Let us not grow weary in well doing, let us not be found lacking as the true disciples of Jesus.

West Center Congregational Monthly Church Calendar

February	African-American History Month AA Heritage Moments during Service Commemorating 400 + Years of Africans in America: 1619-2019
2	COMMUNION SUNDAY Devotion: 10:45-11am; Study of the Lord's prayer 1pm
5	Rev. Kris to meet with Community Leaders in the Lounge for lunch
6.	Rev. Kris to meet with Hon. Shelly Mayer off site
9	Preparing for the Lenten Journey: The Almighty Journey of Faith
11	Meeting of the Armor Villa owners association in the church lounge
26	Ash Wednesday Service 11::05 am in Sanctuary Lenten Almighty Journey of faith begins.
28	Rev. Kris Training a group of Climate Activists in the Lounge 9am-5p through (not open to the public)
29	