

# Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections based on this week's lectionary readings

February 9, 2014  
Fifth Sunday after Epiphany, Year A

## The readings this week:

- *Isaiah 58:1-9a* ◦ *Psalms 112:1-9*
- *1 Corinthians 2:1-12* ◦ *Matthew 5:13-20*

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

## Blessing of Salt, Blessing of Light

Epiphany—a word which itself means **appearing** or **showing forth**—is a season that beckons us to ponder what it is that God desires to manifest through us, and to wrestle with what hinders this. There is much, both within us and without, that works against savoring and shining. Recognizing and resisting the bushels that threaten the light is a practice and a journey all its own. It can be terrifying, these days, to see the ease with which so many of us accept the dimming, allow the bushels that diminish our light as we give over discernment and freedom in exchange for seeming security.

Jesus' words this week are meant to wake us, to remind us of what we carry in our bones: the living presence of the God who bids us be salt in this world in all our savory particularity; to be light in the way that only we can blaze.

So how savory are you these days? How is light finding its way into you and through you? Is there anything—or anyone—that is working against this, that is tipping a bushel over your shining? Might there be some part of you that needs revealing, needs to unhide itself in this Epiphany season?

*The Painted Prayer Book*, Jan Richardson

## Praying Toward Sunday

Holy God, dearest Friend,  
you are the light of our seeing,  
the wisdom of our understanding,  
the delight of our loving.

Assist your people  
so to trust you that we may begin to understand you,  
so to understand you that we may better love you,  
and so to love you that we may more eagerly worship and serve you,

Through Jesus Christ, your very Mind incarnate;  
*Amen!* [Bruce Prewer](#)

## Blessing of Salt, Blessing of Light

By the time you come  
to the end of this blessing  
these words will be barely  
enough  
to fit in the palm of your hand

but fold your fingers around  
them  
and take them  
as an offering  
a sacrament  
a sign:

touch the words  
to your tongue  
and taste how  
they have traveled  
through marrow and bone  
to reach you,  
how they have passed  
through each chamber  
of the heart,  
how they have come  
through the layers  
that make up the soul:  
the strata of stories  
and questions,  
longings and  
dreams.

Savor the way the words  
are not mere residue  
or dross,  
the bitter leavings  
from the refining.

By their taste  
you will know instead  
they are the essence  
they are the core  
they are what has come  
through the burning,

holding still  
the memory of fire  
and the imprint of light;  
holding the clarity that  
comes  
when all that is not needful  
passes away.

So take these words  
as a blessing; touch them  
to your mouth  
(*may you taste*)  
your eyes  
(*may you see*)  
your ears  
(*may you hear*)

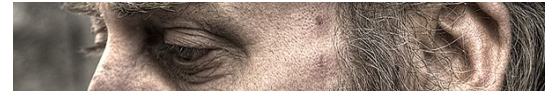
and then let them go,  
let them fall to earth  
where all salt finally goes.

See the path they make  
for you,  
the path that blazes  
inside of you,  
lighting the way  
ahead of you  
that only you  
can go.



Salt and Light, by [howsweetesound](#)  
Photography / Still Life

# Reflecting on the Word



## \_\_\_ 1st Reading: [Isaiah 58:1-9a](#)

In verses 1-3 the people *seem* very religious (after the destruction of Jerusalem, fast days were increased). They are puzzled by God's disinterest. What evaluation do these verses give of the people's religiosity? God has some counter-questions for them in verses 3-5. Why does he refuse to take note of their fasting and to hear their prayers? What positive requirements are laid out in verses 6-10 as those which the Lord desires and delights in?

[InterVarsity Press](#)

## \_\_\_ Psalm Reading: [Psalm 112:1-9](#)

There are many blessing promised for our being generous and godly with our time, talent, and treasure. But when the rubber meets the road, we are also promised things by the world and our flesh if we hold tightly to what we have been given. What are the promises of the world when it comes to us hanging onto what is "ours"? What part of your life do you most struggle to give generously? What would it look like for you to trust in the Lord as your security, as your good news? What other things are you tempted to find security in? Where might God be calling you to be generous and to "scatter abroad" your gifts - do you have time or talent to give, not just finances? [Grace Community Church](#)



## We are They, on Psalm 112

“They.” The word is used repeatedly which gives us something we can start with. “They” is a word that is often used to describe a characteristic or attributes of a group of people. (At least, that is how it’s used here.)

“They”– this group of people being talked about here, are very much blessed. They have definite qualities which are uniquely understood as evidence of a full and rich life. It is also a curiosity of what the text doesn’t say. Nowhere does it talk of material possessions, health or freedom from pain. No new cars, or fishing boats, or a summer bungalow on Long Island either....

Read the entire article at [PsalmsLife.com](#)

God’s Mysterious Wisdom,  
J.R. Daniel Kirk, [WorkingPreacher.org](#)

We often will talk about how a particular person is a "hypocrite" for failing to live up to the standards of the Christian message. But the measure by which Paul takes stock of his ministry cuts against everything that we too often take for granted.

When Paul says he was with them in weakness, fear, and trembling, he is drawing their attention to the type of ministry that accurately embodies the cross of Christ. If the cross is the message, then ministering with integrity means that the messenger will look weak and despised in the eyes of the world--only to have the power of the Spirit of God break through to compel the listeners.

This is the dynamic of the gospel story: power in and out of weakness. It points to the God who brings new life by means of a crucified messiah....Paul maintains that the Spirit whom believers receive is none other than the Spirit of God with God’s cruciform wisdom--it is *not* the Spirit of the world with its Christ-crucifying "wisdom" ...One more time we see that the story we tell about the cross of Christ becomes the measure by which the stories of our own communities are judged. Do we hope to draw people to our communities based on our ability to achieve, in step with the corporate, educational, and political systems that set up our own cultures' assessments of power? Or, are we participating in the upside down economy of the cross, an economy that can only be known and understood and believed and lived by the power of God's Holy Spirit?

## \_\_\_ 3rd Reading: [1 Corinthians 2:1-12](#)

Greek philosophers were often polished orators whose eloquence and wisdom dazzled their audiences. How does this contrast with Paul's preaching in Corinth (2:1-5)? How is God's wisdom different from the wisdom of this age (2:6-10)? Why are *secret* and *hidden* appropriate words to describe this wisdom? Who has been an example of spiritual maturity to you? What can you do to become more spiritually mature? [InterVarsity Press](#)

## \_\_\_ 4th Reading: [Matthew 5:13-20](#)

Jesus compares his followers to salt and light (5:13-16). What do these metaphors suggest about our role in society? In the rest of chapter 5 Jesus discusses various misconceptions we might have about the Law (Old Testament Scriptures). Why do you think that Jesus stresses that he did not come to abolish the Law (5:17-20)? In what way do you need to experience Christ's blessing? [InterVarsity Press](#)