

**February 8, 2026**  
**St. John's Tappahannock**  
**Rev. Nanette Woodworth**  
**Matthew 5:13-20**

This week's lectionary readings build on last week's sermon about the Beatitudes, which reminded us that we are all called to bring in God's kingdom on earth. When we ask ourselves, "How exactly", we found the answers in Micah 6:8

*He has told you, O mortal, what is good;  
and what does the Lord require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God?*

Today's reading from Isaiah tells us the positive consequences of following Micah's imperatives.

This is an excerpt.

- I. <sup>6</sup>Is not this the fast that I choose:  
to loose the bonds of injustice,  
to undo the thongs of the yoke,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
and to break every yoke?
- <sup>7</sup>Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,  
and bring the homeless poor into your house.
- <sup>8</sup>Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,  
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
- <sup>9</sup>Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;  
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.

<sup>11</sup> The Lord will guide you continually,  
and satisfy your needs in parched places,  
and make your bones strong;  
and you shall be like a watered garden,  
like a spring of water,  
whose waters never fail.

<sup>12</sup> Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;  
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;  
**you shall be called the repairer of the breach,  
the restorer of streets to live in.**

So the consequence of doing what is required is the deep satisfaction of working closely with God as repairers of the breach. I am reminded of Habitat for Humanity which began in the early 1970's, and whose founders Rev. Clarence Jordan and Millard and Linda Fuller developed the concept of "partnership housing." The concept centered on those in need of adequate shelter working side by side with volunteers to build decent, affordable houses. They brought their idea to Zaire, now called the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and after three years completed a housing project there. That is when they came back and started the Habitat for Humanity Int'l in 1976, with backers like the late Jimmy Carter and his wife Rosyln. Habitat now works in all 50 states in the U.S. and in more than 70 countries.

I am grateful for the experience as a member of St. Andrews Episcopal Church in Trenton NJ in the 1990's of volunteering to build a home in Trenton for a couple who were both employed, but were unable to save enough for a down payment to purchase a home.

That is the general profile of the folks who are assisted by Habitat. It places them in a better position to thrive and build their lives together. I learned a lot from this local effort.

One thing that draws people to a spiritual community is their outreach efforts – people like to engage in tangible acts of giving. One simple way to evangelize is to wear t-shirts with the name of your church on it while doing an act of social justice, like working on a Habitat for Humanity worksite. I am not trying to sell the idea of partnering with Habitat specifically – I am just celebrating their 50<sup>th</sup> birthday and giving an example of how to draw people in as we plant seeds of social justice together.

We already have the groundwork in place for reaching out to our local community. Our outreach committee has made a strategic shift in how it will request donations by focusing on one of their many efforts per month. So instead of having two or three baskets set out in the narthex for several donations all the time, there will be one at a time. This month St. John's is focusing on collecting school supplies for Essex County schools. There is more information about how you can donate specific items or give checks/cash directly to Rebecca Hundley in today's announcements.

I am hoping that by becoming even more active in Essex Churches Together and operation INASMUCH, by visiting their next meeting with Lori Lenz, St. John's can be present as repairers of the breach in many ways Essex County.

And the results are not only the difference we make, but Corinthians also makes this reassuring promise to the righteous:

From our Epistle today - <sup>9</sup>*But, as it is written,*

*'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,  
nor the human heart conceived,  
what God has prepared for those who love him.'*

Sometimes a repairer of the breach is someone who day to day, in ordinary ways, makes progress in the good. Because the best defense against evil is just that, our individual efforts to be good people where God has placed us. We are strong threads in the tapestries our families and communities.

This reminds me of my parents, who grew up in Wilke-Barre, PA. My Dad was a WWII veteran, who went to college on the GI Bill, and graduated from Muhlenburg College with a major in English Literature. He and my mom who went to Bloomsburg teachers' college started out in the New Paltz area of NY as teachers, then they eventually moved to Long Island NY which was an area of growth and opportunity. Dad became a guidance counselor and then a high school principal, a position which he held for the next 25 years or so. In that time they raised 5 children, all of whom have master's degrees and contribute to their communities in many ways. Dad retired in the late 80's, and he and my mom moved to New Bern NC, where all of the 12 grandchildren (and eventually 13 great grandchildren) would visit several times a year. My Dad was known as a good man. He was not rich. He was not famous. He was someone who was known for his diplomacy, his ability to handle union disputes with dignity, and how to meet the needs of teachers, parents and students with wisdom and a sense of humor. He loved writing recommendations for students to help them get into colleges or vocational school. He had a deep concern for the special needs students, and made sure they were included in every way possible. I

remember one youth was the ball boy at every basketball game. It was obvious how proud of himself he was in that role. He knew that he felt that he belonged, and was valued. Dad loved my mom so much, and was so proud of her for being a great mom plus getting her master's degree so she could teach secretarial science at Farmingdale College to help get us through college. And all of this time, they were active Lutherans, and we attended church as a family all those years. Dad was on the vestry numerous times, and preached when the pastor was away. And I remember that he tithed even during the decade when there were always 2 of us in college, a period during which he rarely bought a new suit or a new used car. What is my point of telling you about my parents? That they lead righteous lives, that they were the salt of the earth, and were generous and kindhearted and had a smile for everyone. And I have omitted stories of several family tragedies from their generation or earlier, their deepest disappointments along the way, and even some poor decisions, *because* what speaks louder to me than these things is *all the goodness*. And how God is with us through all of it. And I know Don and Elvira have a room in the mansion that God has prepared for those who love him and they are at peace, now reunited. Because *'No one can imagine what God has prepared for those who love him'*.

Now let's move on to the final point I want to make about verse 10 from 1 Cor. It contains this astonishing image of the nature of God:

*<sup>10</sup> these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.*

This suggests to me that discovering the mystery of the Holy Spirit's role in the Trinity would be something like discovering all that our oceans contain, or all that great telescopes, like the Hubble and now the Webb can see - so much to fathom, it is impossible to comprehend.

I am reminded of the Rublev Icon, a Russian painting from the 1400's which invites the viewer to contemplate the Circle of Love of the Trinity. If you read Genesis 1:1-2 and John 1:1, it is clear that the Father Son and Holy Spirit were together since *before* the creation. So the three persons of the Trinity enjoy a mystery beyond all else, beyond us – yet to which we are invited, and to live and move and have our being in the One who was, and is, and always shall be.

This brings us to our gospel message which asks us to consider how to recapture the awe of our faith when we lose hope by using the images of salt and light.

How does salt lose its taste?

All chefs know that salt does not in itself, if used correctly, have a taste (unless you use too much!) Salt used correctly brings out the natural flavor of whatever you are cooking. It seems the metaphor is, when we are new to the faith, we are often very exuberant – in fact maybe too exuberant.

I saw a cartoon in the New Yorker once which depicts a dinner party, and husband says to his wife, “Edith, stay away from Charlie, he just read a book that changed his life.”

Sometimes something happens that makes one more than a bit disillusioned regarding our faith – this is often related to questions of

“why bad things happen to good people”, or something unfair has occurred.

It seems unfairness is simply a part of life, yet is not God’s creation, all of it together, still beautiful beyond words? Is not the diversity of creation just Awe Inspiring? Let’s hold onto this idea of being blown away by God’s creation for a moment.

So, when life sends us enough disappointments that we feel we did not deserve, then we may go from enchantment to disenchantment.

Disenchantment is when our salt has lost its taste

Re-enchantment is when through a combination of prayer and reflection and maybe a good therapist, we get back to “enchantment”.

We have our salt back again! We recognize with gratitude all that is good and honest and true and we are wiser for all we have gone through. Once again we are open to the movements of the Holy Spirit and ready to be repairers of the breach.

Instead of being bitter about things, we can grow in compassion for those who have experienced the same thing, or anything that causes people difficulties, where sometimes even just a good word of solace and comfort can go a long way.

Once we return to our former faithful stance, ready to return to the good fight as it were, we are able to once again let our light shine. God will not let us go...God will come after us because God wants us to be on the side of goodness, beside Him, *forever*.

Sitting on the sidelines is fine for a while, but eventually we have to get back into the game – because as has already been said, the best defense against evil is progress in the good. So let's build each other up, not break each other down.

Churches thrive where there is lots of creativity and affirmation of our gifts of the spirit that contribute to the energy needed to carry things out – to bring them from idea to actuality.

As we venture into 2026 together, let's let our light of Christ shine, and allow the joy of our faith to draw others in to hear the good news.

No matter where they are on their spiritual journey, we want them to know they are welcome to walk with us, to learn that they belong.

... and to join St. John's to help tell the Greatest Story ever told, the story of our faith from past to present, which includes all of us, because we are all children of God!