



JOURNEY INWARD *to* JOURNEY OUTWARD

The Journey Outward, Week 5:

JOIN GOD'S WORK IN THE WORLD

Summary

By now, you might be asking, "What do I do?" There are no easy answers to "What do I do?" That might not be the right question. What about, "How can I change" or "How does love win?" The point isn't necessarily to take on new initiatives or show up in new places (although it might be), but to show up faithfully in the places and relationships you already have.

Introduction

The grace of God changes us. It changes how we interact with others and how we faithfully engage with the world around us. Jesus called his disciples "salt" and "light", letting them know that their presence would have a great impact on those around them. What kind of impact will you have?

The readings call us into a centered place where we observe our lives, as well as the world around us, and then move slowly into partnerships, not into outraged, fueled fixers. They call us to notice where our own hearts are pulled and then look prayerfully and carefully for openings.

Bishop Michael Curry gently prompts us to get started, even if the path is unknown. His words echo the Prayer of Good Courage, as he points out that "No one can know where our witness to love might lead." Howard Thurman gives voice to the fact that as we do God's work, there is always evil around us and within us. We pray for the will to be God's hands and feet, even with every-thing that can derail us.

Osheta Moore challenges white peacemakers not be overwhelmed by the strength of hold white supremacy has on our culture, nor by the variety of ways we are told by others to act. She helps us weave a way through the inadequacy of quick fixes and encourages the long view, saying "Love is the most inefficient thing we do."

In this final session, as we wrap up our small groups, it's ok if you're not prepared to make huge leaps. You can trust that God is calling you in every moment of your life to be salt and "light". Together, we step outward in good courage, trusting that God joins us on the way.

Gathering:

- Facilitator: Remind the group of the topics of the first four weeks.
- If anyone wrote a psalm of lament, share.
- Read Howard Thurman's poem, "I seek the strength to overcome evil," together.

Discussion Based on the Readings:

1) Changed from the inside out.

- a. The passage from Romans talks about being changed by God, who gives you a new way of thinking, seeing and walking. Share with the group one way that God has changed you through this small group process.
- b. What do you think God wants for you? Take a couple of minutes and write or draw the answer. Share only if you'd like.
- c. Looking at Howard Thurman's poem, "I seek the Strength to Overcome Evil," underline the phrases that most connect with you. Share.

2) Salt and Light

- a. In the reading from Matthew, Jesus applies the metaphors of "salt" and "light" to his followers. In her essay about this passage, Debie Thomas writes about the meaning of salt. What three positive things does she say salt can do? What's one negative thing? What did you learn from her essay that you could apply to your life?
- b. At baptisms, we echo Jesus's words, "Let your light so shine before others so they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." Give examples of ways that people at Westwood—or the church overall—shine their lights.

3) Love is the way

- a. In smaller groups, share when you have asked yourself some version of the question, "Can my love make a difference?"
- b. Bishop Curry quotes the book *The Overstory*, saying: "The best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago, the second-best time is now." His article has similar themes to the Prayer of Good Courage; we plant seeds not knowing how the garden will grow; we do something, even if we can't do everything.

Discuss how God's timing and action have worked in your life? When have you started something not knowing where it would go?

c. What does the phrase "Love is the way" mean to you?

d. Osheta Moore recognizes that the calls to dismantle white supremacy leave a lot of white people asking, "What am I supposed to do?" She counsels: "You're going to have to accept that it's not going to be easy, nor will you see the results you want, and you may even feel like you're taking two steps forward and three steps back. You'll need humility, dear one." What are your reactions to her descriptions of white supremacy and efficiency? What role does humility play in the journey outward?

e. Read the Prayer of Good Courage together. Why is this prayer important to our church? To you?

Closing

- Share one thing you will take with you from the small group experience.
- Thank each other for participating.
- Close with this prayer, repeated 4 times.

May I be at peace.

May my heart always be open.

May I awaken to the Divine Light within and all around me.

May I be healed. May I be a source of healing.

The next time through the prayer, pray it for someone dear to you.

The third time through, pray it for something of great concern to you in the world.

And lastly, pray it over yourself once more.



Week 5 – Join God’s Work in the World - Scriptures

Romans 12: 1-2 (The First Nations Version)

So then, my sacred family members, because Creator has shown us such mercy and kindness, I now call on you to offer your whole being, heart, mind, and strength, to the Great Spirit as a living sacrifice. Do this in a sacred and spiritual manner that will make His heart glad.

Do not permit the ways of this world to mold and shape you. Instead, let Creator change you from the inside out, *in the way a caterpillar becomes a butterfly*. He will do this by giving you a new way of thinking, seeing, and walking. Then you will know for sure what the Great Spirit wants for you, things that are good, that make the heart glad, and that help you to walk the path of becoming a mature and true human being.

(Note: the part in italics were added by the translators to give clarity; it was not in the original Biblical text).

Matthew 5:13-16

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 underfoot.

¹⁴‘You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶In 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.



Week 5 – Join God’s Work in the World - Readings

Salty, by Debie Thomas

When I was seven years old, my mother decided that I was old enough to help her in the kitchen. My first tasks as her assistant included grating coconuts, chopping onions, and peeling what felt like an infinite number of garlic cloves. But there was one culinary lesson Mom stressed over all others. Before she’d let me preside over an actual pot of curry, I had to learn — or, rather, my *mouth* had to learn — “how to check for salt.”

Under Mom’s tutelage, I learned that it was possible to get every ingredient in a curry just right — to combine perfect amounts of cumin, turmeric, paprika, ginger, garam masala, and cayenne — and still ruin the dish with salt. Too *little* salt, and the curry would remain bland and lifeless, all of its potential zest and kick subdued. Too *much* salt, and the curry would lose its depth and complexity to a sharp, unbearable bitterness.

In our Gospel reading for this week, Jesus says, “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled underfoot.”

Living as most of us do in cultures of plenty, we take household goods like salt for granted. But as Mark Kurlansky writes in his book, *Salt: A World History*, “From the beginning of civilization until about one hundred years ago, salt was one of the most sought after commodities in human history.” The ancients believed that salt would ward off evil spirits. Religious covenants were often sealed with salt. Salt was used for medicinal purposes, to disinfect wounds, check bleeding, stimulate thirst, and treat skin diseases. Roman soldiers were sometimes paid in salt — hence our English word, “salary.” Brides and grooms rubbed salt on their bodies to enhance fertility. The Romans salted their vegetables, as we do our modern day “salads.” Around ten thousand years ago, dogs were first domesticated using salt; people would leave salt outside their homes to entice the animals. And, of course, in all the centuries before refrigeration, salt was essential for food preservation.

Nowadays, we still use salt for all sorts of purposes. Salt accentuates flavors, melts ice, softens water, and hastens a boil. It soothes sore throats, rinses sinuses, eases swelling, and cleanses

wounds. In some contexts, salt has more than a flavor; it has an edge. It stings, burns, abrades, and irritates. If we don't have enough salt in our bodies, we die. But if we have too much? We also die.

I know that it's possible to take a metaphor too far. No single descriptor from Scripture — salt, light, bride, clay, sheep, branch, dove, soil — will capture or contain the entirety of what it means to live as followers of Christ. But when Jesus calls his listeners “the salt of the earth,” he is saying something profound, something we'll miss in our 21st century context unless we press in and pay attention.

First of all, he is telling us who we are. We *are* salt. We are not “supposed to be” salt, or “encouraged to become” salt, or promised that “if we become” salt, God will love us more. The language Jesus uses is 100% descriptive; it's a statement of our identity. We *are* the salt of the earth. We *are* that which will enhance or embitter, soothe or irritate, melt or sting, preserve or ruin. For better or for worse, we are the salt of the earth, and what we do with our saltiness matters. It matters *a lot*. Whether we want to or not, whether we notice or not, whether we're intentional about it or not, we spiritually impact the world we live in.

Secondly, we are precious. Again, it's easy to miss the import of this in our modern world where salt is cheap and plentiful, but imagine what Jesus's *first* followers would have heard when he called them salt. Remember who they were. Remember what sorts of people Jesus addressed in his famous Sermon on the Mount. The poor, the mournful, the meek, the persecuted. The hungry, the sick, the crippled, the frightened. The outcast, the misfit, the disreputable, the demon-possessed. “*You*,” he told them all. “*You* are the salt of the earth.” You who are not cleaned up and shiny and well-fed and fashionable, you who've been rejected, wounded, unloved, and forgotten — you are essential. You are worthwhile. You are treasured. And I am commissioning *you*. For all of us who've spent months or years trying to earn divine favor, believing that our piety might someday make us precious in God's eyes, I hope this metaphor will stop us in our tracks. Jesus knowingly named a commodity that was priceless in his time and place. He conferred great value on those who did not consider themselves valuable. He is still doing this. For us. Now.

Thirdly, salt does its best work when it's poured out. When it's scattered. When it dissolves into what is around it. I would have done my mother's curry recipes no favors if I'd kept our salt shaker locked in a kitchen cabinet. Salt isn't meant to cluster. It's meant to give of itself. It's meant to share its unique flavor in order to bring out the best in all that surrounds it. Which means that if we want to enliven, enhance, deepen, and preserve the world we live in, we must not hide within the walls of our churches. We must not cluster and congregate simply for our own comfort. We must not retreat into our pious, theological bubbles out of fear, cynicism, shame, or self-righteousness.

Salt doesn't exist to preserve itself; it exists to preserve what is *not* itself. Another metaphor for this? A metaphor Jesus used all the time? *Dying*. Jesus calls us to die to self. To die in order to live. Remember — we *are* salt. It's not a question of striving to become what we are not. It's a question of living into the precious fullness of what we already are.

Lastly, salt is meant to enhance, not dominate. Christian saltiness heals; it doesn't wound. It purifies; it doesn't desiccate. It softens; it doesn't destroy. Even when Christian saltiness has an edge, even when, for example, it incites thirst, it only *draws* the thirsty towards the Living Water of God. It *doesn't* leave the already thirsty parched, dehydrated, and embittered.

One of the great tragedies — and most consequential sins — of historic Christianity has been its failure to understand this distinction. Salt *fails* when it dominates. Instead of eliciting goodness, it destroys the rich potential all around it. Salt poured out without discretion leaves a burnt, bitter sensation in its wake. It ruins what it tries to enhance. It repels. This, unfortunately, is the reputation Christianity has all-too-often these days. We are known as the salt that exacerbates wounds, irritates souls, and ruins goodness. We are considered arrogant, domineering, obnoxious, and uninterested in enhancing anything but ourselves. We are known for hoarding our power — not for giving it away. We are known for shaming, not blessing. We are known for using our words to burn, not heal.

This is not what Jesus ever intended when he called us the salt of the earth. Our preciousness was never meant to make us proud and self-righteous; it was meant to humble and awe us.

So what do we do? Our vocation in these times and places is not to lose our saltiness. That's the temptation — to retreat. To hide. To choose blandness instead of boldness. To keep our love for Jesus a hushed and embarrassed secret.

But that kind of salt, Jesus told his listeners, is useless. It is untrue to its very essence. And so we are called to live wisely, creatively, and in balance. To learn — as my mother put it when I was a little girl — “how to check for salt.” Salt at its best sustains and enriches life. It pours itself out with discretion so that God's kingdom might be known on the earth — a kingdom of spice and zest, a kingdom of health and wholeness, a kingdom of varied depth, flavor, and complexity.

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus makes concrete the work of love, compassion, healing, and justice. It's not enough to simply believe. It's not enough to bask in our blessedness while all around us God's creation burns. To be blessed, to be salt, to be followers of Jesus, is to take seriously what our identity signifies.

We are the salt of the earth. That is what *we are*, for better or for worse. May it be for better. May your pouring out — and mine — be for the life of the world.



I seek the strength to overcome evil, by Howard Thurman

I seek the strength to overcome evil.

I seek the strength to overcome the tendency to evil in my own heart.

I recognize the tendency to do the unkind thing when the mood of retaliation and revenge rides high in my spirit;

I recognize the tendency to make of others a means to my own ends;

I recognize the tendency to yield to fear and cowardice when fearlessness and courage seem to fit easily into the pattern of my security,

I seek the strength to overcome the tendency to evil in my own heart.

I seek the strength to overcome the evil that is present all about me.

I recognize the evil in much of the organized life about me;

I recognize the evil in the will to power as found in groups, institutions and individuals;

I recognize the terrible havoc of hate and bitterness which makes for fear and panic in common life.

I seek the strength to overcome the evil that is present all about me.

I seek the strength to overcome evil; I must not be overcome by evil.

I seek the purification of my own heart, the purging of my own motives;

I seek the strength to withstand the logic of bitterness, the terrible divisiveness of hate, the demonic triumph of the conquest of others.

What I seek for myself I desire with all my heart for friend and foe alike.

I seek the strength to overcome evil.

Howard Thurman, "I Seek the Strength to Overcome Evil" in

Meditations of the Heart, Beacon Press, 1953.

Love is the Way, by Bishop Michael Curry

Question: I'm just a regular person—can my love have an impact?

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing this. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.

—Bishop Ken Untener

In Richard Powers' Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *The Overstory*, one of the characters tells a joke that goes something like this: What's the best time to plant a tree? Twenty years ago. What's the second-best time? Right now.

The best time to plant a seed is now. Change is a long, slow march heavenward, with as many twists and turns as there are branches in a growing tree. Accepting that change doesn't necessarily conform to any human timeline or plan is the first step. The second step is to stop worrying about it and get moving.

I have a nine-year term as the presiding bishop of The Episcopal Church. If you had asked me when I was twenty-five what I expected I could get done in that time, the answer would have been very different from what I would tell you today. Back then, I would have expected to see some tangible fruit. What I've learned in the intervening years is that my job is only to sow the seeds. That's everyone's job. The error of youth is thinking that you've succeeded—or it's worth contributing—only when you can see, touch, or taste the fruit.

Human progress and change for the good is never linear. "Battles are lost with the same spirit in which they are won," as Walt Whitman wrote. "No cross, no crown," as the old saying goes. And so, whatever our effort, whatever we may wish, we might go one step forward, two steps back, two steps forward, then one step back, a detour here, a circling back there, and on and on. The journey is always a struggle. But the movement is always forward, no matter the obstacles.

Now if you ask me why this is the case, I'll answer honestly: I don't know. All I know is that it is. As Frederick Douglass, himself a former slave who won his emancipation and then committed his life to freeing others, put it, "If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground; they want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters."¹



All human progress and change for the good, whether individual or social, is the result of struggle, often long and laborious. Our task is to do our task, not to do every task needed for progress to happen. When we accept that, we free ourselves to do what we can, with the time and resources we have. We “keep a-inchin’ along, like the po’ inchworm,” as the spiritual goes. In 2015, in his Christmas homily, Pope Francis sought to express this truth by quoting the words often attributed to the late Óscar Romero, the archbishop of El Salvador, who was killed for his commitment to bettering the lives of the poor in his country. Though Romero didn’t write them, they reflect who this great soul was and what he stood for: “We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are workers, not master builders, ministers not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own.”²

The distance between you and a historic changemaker such as Mother Teresa, the Dalai Lama, Madame Curie, or Abe Lincoln is not so great as you think. Your job is to do your job, as theirs was to do theirs. God is God. We are human. The God who the Bible says is love knows all and sees all. Meanwhile, we’re only human, and as St. Paul says, “We see through a glass, darkly.” By the way, when Paul said that, it was in that same great poem to love we talked about earlier.

None of us can know where our witness to love might lead—what light we might bring to the world. Our job is to do our job, and to let God do God’s job. Former Morehouse men who were students of the late Benjamin Elijah Mays have told me that he often said in chapel services, “Faith is taking your best step and leaving the rest to God.” The only thing we need to know is this: The nature of progress is struggle, and if we give up because victory seems so far away or outside our individual grasp that we can’t see it, then we’ve lost already. Our job is to do our job, and to let God do God’s job.

Michael B. Curry, *Love is the Way*, (pp. 121-123), Penguin Publishing Group



Dear White Peacemakers, Osheta Moore

I know you. You hear Black leaders like me say things like “Do the work” and “This work isn’t about you,” and in the back of your mind you wonder, “What does that look like for me? I mean... where do I begin? I want to learn. I want to engage, But this is all so very new to me. I want to look like Jesus and overturn the tables of racial oppression, but I’m afraid of saying the wrong thing...I mean...I’m just a White person?”

You love Jesus with your whole heart, but when you think about his ministry of reconciliation, you feel overwhelmed. I get that! I’m a Black woman, married to a White man, raising biracial children. I’ve gone to workshops and trainings on multiculturalism. We chose to live in the city for the diversity, and we intentionally build relationships with people from different social locations. I’m someone who loves Martin Luther King, James Baldwin, Maya Angelou, and John Perkins, and I still wonder about the logistics of dismantling White supremacy culture. Just literally the other day, I was wondering if I had committed a microaggression against a Chinese American friend. This is not for the faint of heart, Beloved. And still, I believe in you. I know how you feel sometimes. The calls for action are varied and sometimes opposing:

Do your work, White people

Pray for unity, people of God

Defund the Police

Black Lives Matter

Blue Lives Matter

All Lives Matter to God

Show up

Stop centering yourself

Silence is complicity

Speaking up is exerting your privilege

If your pastor isn’t preaching about race, then you should leave

If your church isn’t talking about race, then stay and use your voice

Use this hashtag

Stop using that hashtag



If there is one question I get with some regularity, it is “What the heck am I supposed to do?”

Sometimes it's asked with a passive shrug of the shoulders and a small voice.

Sometimes it's asked with great enthusiasm and manic energy.

I want you to know I get it. All of these calls to action are so frustrating and oftentimes seemingly in conflict with each other. Because anti-racism educators bring their personalities, their theologies, and their histories to this work, you need to step back from all the calls to action for a moment. Quiet yourself to help you discern what to do next, work through your confusions in community, and then reject White supremacy's pull toward inaction or, even worse, transferring that anxious energy into a defensive tactic of comparing two teachers' pedagogies against each other.

Let me caution you, though—White supremacy is not an easy problem to fix. It has influenced everything that makes up Western life: media, education, housing, nonprofit organizations, finances, churches, history books, healthcare, city planning, even food. There is not one thing in our society that has not been tainted by White supremacy. It's going to take a long-haul, sustainable strategy of undoing and rebuilding. There are no quick fixes here. If you want to dismantle White supremacy, you're going to need to get comfortable with trying and failing. You'll need to have tough skin and a tender heart. You'll need to know that the small intentional acts of humility, of you sacrificially loving your Black and Brown neighbor enough to reject a system that has made you comfortable, will be the work of your life. It's okay. You can do this. You are not alone. Even though I know everything in you feels like you've got to fix it all and fix it now. That's White supremacy's influence for ya.

White supremacy culture values quantity over quality. Efficacy is the standard by which something's worth is measured. You can see its influence in questions like: Does it accomplish the job in record time, with the least amount of effort and for the biggest profit? Wow....as I type that, I think, well it's obvious why chattel slavery became indispensable to a young America. It was effective. It's why after the Thirteenth Amendment was passed, outlawing slavery except as punishment for a crime, thousands of recently enslaved men were criminalized for not having a job or loitering in public places. They were put in prison and forced to work to keep the Southern economy afloat. But I always quote this from pastor Bruxy Cavey: “Love is the most inefficient thing we'll do.” If you want to do this work, you're going to have to accept that it's not going to be easy, nor will you see the results you want, and you may even feel like you're taking two steps forward and three steps back. You'll need humility, dear one. So let's unpack that.

Love, Osheta

Prayer of Good Courage

O God, you have called your servants
to ventures of which we cannot see the ending,
by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown.

Give us faith to go out with good courage,
not knowing where we go,
but only that your hand is leading us
and your love supporting us,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

