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A few months ago we had my parents over for dinner.
It was near the end of the growing season
and we had a bunch of collard greens
direct from Jenny Jack Farm.

I was so excited.
Just a week or two before that,
Casey had found a new recipe
and made the most delicious greens I'd ever eaten.

On the night my parents came,
she was busy with one thing or another,
and so I was cooking the greens before she got there.

It's an easy recipe.
Half a pound of smoked meat,
house seasoning,
salt,
red pepper sauce,
greens,
and since this is a Paula Deen recipe,
it calls for butter.

I washed the collards,
cut the stems off,
threw some smoked turkey legs in there
and off we went.

An hour or two later
I was scooping out those greens
and had my pepper sauce ready to go.

And then I saw my dad's face
as he ate the greens,
and it looked like he was about to turn inside out.
And then I tried them
and about did the same thing.

What went wrong?
What did I do?
I followed the directions.
There was even this delicious house seasoning that went into it.

Casey, who had successfully followed this recipe just a few weeks before
asked me, "did you put **all** of the house seasoning in there?"
"Well I put all that it called for."

I whipped out my phone
and pulled up the recipe:
half a pound of smoked meat,
a cup of salt,
a quarter cup of black pepper,
a quarter cup garlic powder.

They all looked at me like I was crazy.
Casey came around
and pointed out what is probably obvious to you all by now.
"You don't put a cup of salt in with a bunch of collard greens.
You are supposed to mix all that up
and then put just a little of it in at a time."

Sure enough,
there in the recipe,
"1 tablespoon of House seasoning."
A tablespoon
and I'd put in a cup and a half.
Most of it salt.

“You are the salt of the earth.
If salt has lost its taste,
how can its saltiness be restored?”

It’s such a weird question, to me.
I’m not sure that I’ve ever experienced salt losing its saltiness.
It’s salt;
it’s salty.
That’s just the way it works.

In Jesus’ day salt had a number of uses:
seasoning food,
curing meats,
but also breaking down manure.
(Luke’s gospel even mentions this specifically.)
Salt is useful stuff.

We don’t break down a lot of manure around here,
at least most of us.
And most of us have refrigerators
and don’t need to cure meat,
unless we just like the taste of it.

But salt was vital.
We need it for life,
they needed it for life and for living.

“You are the light of the world.
A city built on a hill cannot be hid.”

All sorts of reasons you build a city on a hill.
It’s harder to invade,
less likely to flood,
sewers always work better when they go downhill.
And you make a statement:
here we are,
come and join us.”

If you’ve got a light,
if you are the light,
then be like a city on a hill,
be strategic with your light.

All of that makes good sense.
But I’m going to be honest with you.
None of it makes sense together.
Why on earth does Jesus call us salty
and then call us light?
What does one have to do with the other?

I think it comes down to that question of strategy.

I didn't execute my recipe very well when my parents came to visit.

It was all laid out for me,

and I just got busy and did it wrong.

But imagine the other way around.

Imagine you are cooking five potatoes

and you put in enough salt for those five.

And then you add 30 more potatoes.

It's not going to be salty enough.

It will seem as though salt has lost its saltiness.

I believe that Jesus is asking us to be strategic,

to believe that we are salt and light

and to imagine that we have a job to do,

a job that will glorify God.

"Let your light shine before others,

so that they may see your good works

and give glory to your Father in heaven."

Can we imagine that we are strategically placed to glorify God?

That each of us has gifts and talents aplenty

to offer to God good and laudable service?

Can we let go of those things

which distract us from offering that service?

Can we let go of those things

which are least essential

to our role in building up the kingdom of God.

But it's not easy.

It's about God,
and so it's never bound to be easy.

We all get given some work by God,
but we also get handed a whole bunch of expectations
by other people.

It's a job to figure out the difference.
It's a job and a half
to sort through the expectations of other people
and get down to the work that God has given us to do.

Where do you need to be salt?
Where do you need to season and preserve the kingdom of God?
Where do you need to shine your light?
What gets in the way of doing all that?
Your fears,
the anxieties of other people?
It's a mess.
A holy mess.

I can offer you only this by way of advice,
to help us all sort through that holy mess
of work
and grace
and the people in our lives
who bring us not only unwanted work,
but also unexpected grace.

Nearly every day I listen to the Writer's Almanac as I eat my breakfast.
It's a quiet moment after the girls are at school
and before I enter the world of expectations I find here at church.

Each episode ends with these words.
"Be well,
do good work,
and keep in touch."

Most days that's about all we can do.
Wish ourselves and one another well,
get about the work that God has given us to do,
and keep in touch,
with God and with one another,
by coming here,
by sharing the bread and the wine
and by sharing the work
as God would have us to do.

It's a mess.

It's hard to figure out if you are being too salty
or if you've overloaded your pot.

It's hard to listen and sort out the difference
between where God would have you shine that light he's given you,
and where the rest of the world thinks you ought to shine it.

It's a holy mess.

And this is about all you can do:

“Be well,
do good work,
and keep in touch.”

God will work out the rest,

one way...

or another