

Davidson College Presbyterian Church
Davidson, North Carolina
Lib McGregor Simmons, Pastor
“Oh, I Think We’ve Found Ourselves Some Cheerleaders”
Isaiah 58: 1-9a; Matthew 5: 13-20
5th Sunday After Epiphany
February 5, 2017

It’s Super Bowl Sunday which means all eyes are on the Patriots, the Falcons, and, of course... their cheerleaders.

(I bet that you thought that I was going to say “commercials”! Well, that too! Not to mention Lady Gaga’s halftime show!)

But back to cheerleaders...

Don’t the opening words of the Old Testament reading from Isaiah 58 bring to mind a cheerleader raising a megaphone and blaring out to the people, “Shout out, lift up your voice like a trumpet! Announce to the people their rebellion!”?

And whenever I read the portion of the Sermon on the Mount that is today’s New Testament lesson, I can’t help remembering the many times I’ve been enthralled by my all-time favorite musical *Godspell*. It brings out my inner cheerleader, “You are the light of the world. If your light is under a bushel, it’s lost something kind of crucial. You are the light of the world. You are the salt of the earth. If your salt has lost its flavor, it’s not got much in its favor. You are the salt of the earth.”

In today’s Scripture readings, God speaking through the Prophet and Jesus himself are our cheerleaders, rooting for us to be ever more faithful in our discipleship.

One of the things that is crucial to hear in Jesus’s exhortation is that “you are the salt of the earth” and “you are the light of the world” are stated declaratively. It is “you are,” not “you should be” or “you may become” or even “you must be” the salt of the earth and the light of the world. As Brian Maas says, there is no works righteousness sneaking in here. God has done all the heavy lifting. You *are*. It’s a done deal. And that, my dear brothers and sisters, is what grace is. (1) It is the belovedness that God bestowed upon Jesus as a blessing at his baptism passed on to you, to me, to all of us. “You are my beloved son.” “You are my beloved daughter.” It is God’s love given to us not because of anything that we have or have not done, but simply because we are.

And having been named as God’s own sons and daughters, we are, we exist, according to Jesus to mix the grace that we have received up in the world. Following hard on the heels of his Beatitudes (which we read last week), Jesus is saying that if disciples are to live grace, it isn’t enough to work inside the church community. It’s not enough to nurture a strong interior life of spirituality. No, the result of one’s piety means pouring ourselves out into people, culture, and society to bring out the world’s complex and beautiful flavors.(2)

There is perhaps no better example than the Souper Bowl of Caring.

The Souper Bowl of Caring grew out of a prayer offered by Brad Smith, then a seminary intern at Spring Valley Presbyterian Church in Columbia, SC: "Lord, even as we enjoy the Super Bowl football game, help us be mindful of those without a bowl of soup to eat." Thinking about the prayer, the youth group at Spring Valley Presbyterian Church challenged 22 other church youth groups in Columbia to receive an offering for hunger ministries in the city. In that first year, 1990, those 22 churches raised \$5700 along with food items. In 2016 almost 7,000 churches and schools joined the effort to fight hunger in their communities and raised \$10,500,000 in food items and cash. Since 1990, over \$100 million dollars has been raised and contributed to hunger ministries across the nations.

Now I have been thinking about that youth group in that not-huge church in Columbia. You know how it is, seniors graduate and move on, juniors become seniors and they graduate and move on, and so on. And one would not be surprised had the effort of that youth group simply been a fantastic one-time project. But somehow their fantastic one-time project taken root and grown and flourished.

I said that I have been thinking about the Spring Valley Presbyterian youth group, but that isn't all. I have also been thinking about the Davidson College Presbyterian Church youth group. Specifically, I have been thinking about the eighth grade confirmation class with whom I have the privilege of working between now and May.

One of the practices of the confirmation class is to write individual statements of faith. We study the Apostles' Creed, the church's ancient statement of faith. This becomes the basis of exploring and articulating what it is that each confirmand "believes."

But the example of the Spring Valley youth group coupled with today's Scripture lesson inspires me to challenge our 2017 confirmation class to think big, to consider a project through which they can mix up their faith with the world in order to bring out the world's complex and beautiful flavors.

We know that they have God and Jesus rooting for them, but they need cheerleaders like the rest of you. Will you be their cheerleaders as they pray and talk about and consider what God is calling them to do together? Will you be their cheerleaders?

1. Brian Maas, "Living the Word," *Christian Century*, January 18, 2017,
2. Scott Hoezee, The Center for Excellence in Preaching, Epiphany 5A, January 30, 2017.