

Numbers 11:4-6,10-16,24-29

Mark 9:38-50

James 5:13-20

“Let the words of my mouth and  
the meditation of my heart be  
acceptable in your sight.” AMEN!

Thank you!

Thankyou, for what you do, for  
the generosity in your giving,  
and by the way you live in compassion.

Each week, I stand to preach the gospel  
to the best of my ability and with  
the Spirit’s guidance.

It’s never perfect and being a human  
that’s impossible anyway.

I need to hear the message desperately,  
and so do you; the world needs  
the gospel desperately.

So thank you for your work and  
your giving to allow  
this word to be spoken.

But, they are not just words, right?

What we do is put the words into action.

Love in action because we have hearts to help  
and the means to give aid. (Pause)

This past Monday a few of us went to  
the church called “Eglise Bateau de L’Evangile  
de Jesus Christ.”

We went to meet Pastor Hugues and  
a member of the congregation, Mr. Livens.

An architectural engineer who created  
the plan drawings for the efficient homes  
desperately needed in Haiti.

We went to meet and hear their story.

We hope to be a partner in bringing them to fruition.

Their congregation is on South Monroe St.

They welcomed us with the hospitality of the Holy Spirit.

We met to discuss the Spirit-led plan  
to provide housing for the thousands of  
homeless people in Haiti after the earthquake.

Each structure is designed to be a  
duplex to shelter two families.

You probably already know the dire situation in Haiti:  
earthquakes, hurricanes and political turmoil.

So tragic it is there, that an influx of refugees  
are gathered under the Del Rio overpass in Texas,  
hoping to find asylum in the United States.

Our government struggles to know  
what to do with the people seeking refuge  
and living on the dirt without water or  
sanitation or protection from the elements.

It appears, unfortunately, that the best solution  
our government leaders can do is round them up  
and shuttle people on a plane and fly them  
back to Haiti.

“We are being flown back to hell,” one man pleaded.

“We are being delivered back to a land  
that is easily forgotten by its neighbor,  
the United States.”

But, the church universal has not forgotten them  
because God has not forsaken them.

This relationship with the local Haitian congregation  
began when a member of our outreach team  
read about their pastor’s work in  
the Tallahassee Democrat and then  
came to the group with the story.

It is an example of how our

St. Stephen system works.

After the team met and began to develop  
a mission statement and they voted to put  
some money where our mouths were.

The outreach team then began  
to talk to you, congregation.

Talk about the plan and the Spirit of God  
took over and now leads us forward.

Your gift checks began to come in the mail.

Added funds to the \$500 pledged from  
the Outreach team's budget.

In the midst of a capital campaign,  
your regular giving, aid to victims of Hurricane Ida,  
many are stepping up to also give  
to help to the suffering in Haiti.

Why do we add another struggle  
to raise money to our list? Why?

When the mountain of need is so great,  
why do we add another mission? (Pause)

A simple answer is because "That's what we do."

And the fourfold reason is in each

lesson assigned for our worship today.

First, in Numbers we hear the account of Moses  
being pushed to the breaking point by  
the rabble of the people with a strong craving.

Like the people under the bridge at the border.

They were in dire straits, too.

Starving to the point that slavery even  
looked like a blessing.

Moses pleaded to God to help him lead and  
to help him feed the people.

Pleading with God is also called prayer.

Everything starts with prayer and  
everything continues with prayer. (Pause)

Then, second, in the psalm we find the song writer  
giving thanks for the “Law of the Lord.”

The law is the covenant that God and  
God’s people cut together.

“I will be your God and you will be my people.”

God gave the people rules and laws to help  
them to be a better community.

To teach them how to care for one another,  
to do life with one another, and be good to each other.

God knows human beings need this instruction  
on how to be a healthy community.

We need it, too. (Pause)

Third, in James, where we read  
the final words of that epistle.

Pray, sing, and heal...

“Is anyone suffering? They should pray.

Is anyone among you ill?  
Summon the elders of the church and  
they should pray and anoint  
with oil in the name of the Lord.”

This is what community does  
to be healthy and growing.

Pray, sing AND heal!

The healing part is the love in action.

There are a variety of wealth levels among us,  
we may not consider ourselves rich, but  
we are all rich.

In comparison to most of the world,  
in comparison to the people in Haiti,  
we are all rich.

But, even the rich cannot do much by ourselves.

The mountain is too high to go it alone.

“Pray, sing, and heal,” they are  
the three parts of the formula that take us  
into the gospel lesson today where we learn  
our fourth reason of why we do what we do.

(Pause)

Before we get there, it should be known that today  
is the first of four weeks of challenging texts  
from Mark.

That’s just a friendly, pastoral warning. :-)

The next four weeks will challenge us  
because Jesus wants us to be clear on what  
the cost of discipleship is.

It’s about praying, singing, and healing  
but not in seclusion;

not for self-preservation, not to save the institution...  
not to make it about us.

It's good for us to see that it even happened  
to Jesus' closest followers.

The disciples couldn't cast out a demon  
in a young boy earlier in chapter 9 and now  
they complain to Jesus that another is  
casting out demons using Jesus' name

but that person was not one of  
their immediate group, so they  
wanted to stop him.

“He's not one of us, Jesus.  
Let's call him out and make  
him stop helping people.”

It's sounds ridiculous when we put  
it into words like that.

Talk about the human condition, right?

But we do it too.

I know I do, but Jesus taught,  
“Do not stop them, for no one who  
does a deed of power in my name  
will soon be able to speak evil of me.”

Jesus shows us here the gravity of our behavior.

Jesus is not nonchalant about what we do.



Pray, sing, and heal.

“Whoever is not against us is for us.  
They shall not lose their reward.”

The hard part comes with the next verses in Mark.

Being a “stumbling block” leads to Jesus saying  
that one is better off having a millstone tied  
around their neck and then thrown into the sea.

Is it really better to be killed than it is to cause a  
little one to stumble?

Is self harm something we should do  
in order to not sin?

No! Of course, not. This is hyperbole.

They are exaggerations from Jesus to  
make a very important point.

It is not all about us.

When we fight with other denominations,  
or other religions, or even with atheists  
that are doing loving and healing things  
we are becoming a stumbling block.

The Greek word for stumbling block is skandalon,

literally a trap for a live animal.

Skandalon is a metaphor for  
when life goes wrong.

Jesus taught the disciples and every follower  
to this very day that we ought not be a trap  
for other people.

When we become stumbling blocks or  
try to trap others we potentially harm them  
and life goes wrong. (Pause)

Now, finally, I want to get into the last  
two verses about salt and being at peace  
with one another.

I am not sure, honestly how these two go together,  
but I am all for being at peace with my neighbors.

As Rolf Jacobsen, Professor of OT theology  
at Luther Seminary wrote,

“I will say one thing, I’ve known  
a lot of “salty” people.

Most of the people I like most are  
at least a little salty.

When you meet them, it doesn’t take long  
for you to realize that there is

a real person here.

Strong people, with convictions and they  
might even push back at you.

My favorite teachers were salty.

My most beloved parishes were salty.

My best friends are salty.

My most memorable students were salty.

My most important mentors were salty.

The best pastors and preachers  
that I know are salty.

I have learned this about salty people-  
they can and inevitably do-  
lose their saltiness.

I've seen salty people age.

I've seen the music of eternity play on  
until salty people sicken and die.

I've seen time's winged chariot draw near and  
do its evil work until even the saltiest of people  
grow so weak and exhausted that when  
the angel of death finally arrives,

that angel is greeted as the angel of mercy.

I've seen it with beloved parishioners,  
favorite teachers, memorable students,  
and last year,"

Rolf went on to say,

"when I saw it with my mother  
just before she died.

So maybe, just maybe, it is fitting  
to think about "salt losing its saltiness" in regards  
to people rather than rocks."

Beloved, we are perishable, mortal, and someday  
we will all die.

Jesus said it himself, "Salt is good.  
Everyone will be salted with fire."

Do not be alarmed with the language of fire.

We know that fire and the Holy Spirit are virtually synonymous  
in the Bible.

The Holy Spirit, somehow and someway,  
with re-salt us.

And that's enough to know.

We can stay salty by praying, singing, and healing.  
And then by knowing that, if  
    the New Testament scriptures are true,  
        even death will not have the last word and

we will put on imperishability and be salted again  
    and at peace with one another.

AMEN!