

Loving Creator, Compassionate Sibling, Accompanying Spirit,
We seek to be mindful of your ways,
Even in the midst of turbulent times,
Especially in the midst of turbulent times,
Remind us of how this is all supposed to go,
Remind us that love is always the answer.
Always.

Love for ourselves, love for our friends and family,
Love for our enemies - and we acknowledge that those lines are blurry.
Help us to be faithful to our personal truth,
That which makes us uniquely suited to thrive in this world,
So that we can be beautiful instruments of your peace,
A peace that this world desperately needs.
And so we ask that you take our minds and think through them,
Take our mouths and speak through them,
And take our hearts and set them on fire. Amen.

You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. Salt... and...
Light. You know... this would be a great name for a church, yes?

I am moved by people who know their flavor and aren't afraid to share that
flavor with the world - as if they just know that they are a necessary and
interesting ingredient that this great stew of the earth needs. And I think I
am particularly moved by people who see themselves this way because

they know that they are not the only ingredient in the stew. To have that combination of confidence to know who one is and humility to know that one can't possibly do this without the help of others. Who do you know like that? Someone who both knows their flavor and their place in the greater stew?

The last two years I have felt pretty bland for the most part. Like a filling midwestern casserole - lots of butter. Lots of macaroni. Lots of American cheese. Lots of white bread crumbs. And aside from some bits of pimentos: no flavor. And it had an impact on my heart. I am humbled to be here again in the midst of some pretty major transitions - which are uncomfortable. And yet, maybe being comfortable or finding stability is a luxury that most can ill-afford in this world, so this expensive lesson I am learning could be a valuable way to identify with those for whom this is an expected way of life from birth. Without work, moving constantly, uprooting, in love, but uncertain about what lies ahead - personally vocationally and globally. And yet, here I am, declaring that I am running for president. Just kidding - I am declaring that I am discovering my own flavor, discovering what it means to be a light for the world by generating that divine light from within.

For years I had been trying to make my flavor profile be something that it wasn't. I am not an entrepreneur and my strategy leadership needs a LOT of work. And yet, the big C Church in its acknowledgment of its membership decline, was crying out for people who were charismatic

strategic entrepreneurs to step up to the plate and get the church out of the hole that it was in. I got the impression that the last thing we needed was chaplains taking up the place of entrepreneurial pastors who could actually grow the church. And I bought it. My whole life and personality profile had always pointed me toward pastoral, counseling, chaplain-y kind of roles, but I resisted jumping full into those roles and thought, “Why can’t I just bring that kind of spirit into whatever role I am playing?” Be a developer. Be an entrepreneur pastor. But sprinkle your chaplain-y goodness over the top of whatever you are doing. Except that it was always half-hearted or ill-fitting.

I am now jumping full into it. I don’t know how its all going to play out, but I am stepping forward into this new vocational path of hospital chaplain with dumb gusto.

But this isn’t ONLY about self-expression and discovering what I love to do. These are strange and hard times we are living in. When national leaders seem to turn a blind eye to ethics violations that could have severe consequences on the survivability of too many on this earth; when our neighbors to the south - human beings fighting for that very survival - are treated like cattle at the hands of those same leaders; when our earth is groaning under the years of abuse that we continue to heap upon it; and to top it all off, when a new virus is spreading causing serious illness and death with side consequences of isolationism and xenophobia.

On that latter note, I would ask special prayers today for my best friend's brother Steven and his partner Jiaxuan and their family, who live in China. I have known Steven since he was in the 4th grade and it is a little surreal to imagine him in this situation. Jiaxaun is pregnant and having early contractions and the baby doesn't seem to be developing as it should. The private hospital that they are currently in has been told that they must close due to precautions surrounding the virus. Steven and Jiaxuan must move to a different hospital. Herein lies the difficult decisions.

Option 1: If they go to another private hospital (like they are currently in), it is likely that it will also close and they would have to move again

Option 2: If they go to a larger government hospital they cannot take 5 year old Xavier with them into that hospital and he would have to stay with paid child care workers. Jiaxuans parents cannot get him, because the roads are also closed

Option 3: If Steven and 5 year old Xavier find a place to stay, Steven is not available to be at the hospital to take care of Jiaxuan and baby. Jiaxuan, with a C-section would have to care for herself and the baby - possibly a premature baby. It is the family's responsibility to take care of the patient - not the hospital.

Steven's mom says that he is so torn. Either way he leaves his loved ones in a traumatic situation: Leaving a 5 year old with strangers or his wife and newborn baby without care.

They are calling people they know to see if anyone can be at the hospital

with Jiaxuan, but the fear surrounding the virus leaves people skittish to spend unnecessary time in a hospital. So prayers for Steven and his family, whose traumatic situation in the midst of chaos has made this outbreak seem all the more real to me.

All of what is surrounding us - corrupt power, immigration nightmares, climate devastation, illness and death - can have the capacity to make us shrink away, to self-medicate, to escape, to hunker down, to hide ourselves in order to protect ourselves, thereby hiding our gifts, our internal light, our flavor - but it is precisely our gifts, our light, and our flavor that are needed in this global situation right now. Many of you've undoubtedly heard of the Francis Beuchner quote: "Vocation is the place where our deep gladness meets the world's deep need." It is often a quote that is used to help people discerning a ministry calling, but we believe everyone is called - in the priesthood of all believers, yes? Not just those who go into debt to go to seminary! But let that sit with you for a second: "Vocation is the place where our deep gladness meets the world's deep need."

Isn't this just about turning that light inside out and allowing others to participate in that light and for that light to have purpose? To have that flavor that is inside you to be released into this giant stew and make this world bend toward justice... mercy... loving kindness... hospitality... friendship.

Perhaps you've been like me, where I was desperate to meet the world's deepest need, but at the expense of what really brings out my fullest flavor.

Its not that the world doesn't need entrepreneurs or fundraisers, but the world doesn't need *me* to be an entrepreneur or a fundraiser! I have other gifts to offer. Gifts of presence, listening, thoughtfulness, easy relatability, unflappable. The world needs present, thoughtful, unflappable me to be with people who are in their most vulnerable points of life - to help them experience love and kindness - to help them experience the divine alongside them in their journey. That's what makes me come alive and I can see now that it is not a backseat vocation but that this has value and purpose.

You've probably also heard this quote from Howard Thurman: "Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive." Beautiful words, but I used to cringe at those words because I knew how true they were and how far I was from living into that truth.

One of the many reasons that I've loved being a part of this congregation, this "Salt and Light" Lutheran Church, is that it is filled with a healthy, transitory flow of people who have the courage to discover their flavor and unabashedly let their lights shine brightly. Perhaps when a church closes down and experiences resurrection with this kind of name, it attracts

flavorful and light-filled people! You have inspired me to experiment, to see that failure is not trying, to release my own shame, and to recognize - in spite of these fearful times - the abundance that is constantly surrounding us. What a beautiful collection of flavorful souls I see! I wonder: what flavor are you? Are you salty? sweet? tangy? spicy? Bitter? Sour? Orange? How do you think that you encounter the world? What flavor do you feel called to become?

Find a partner and ask one another to name their flavor and to talk with one another about the Beuchner quote: "Vocation is the place where our deep gladness meets the world's deep need." What is your deep gladness? Where do you think it intersects with the world's deep need?

Deep down inside of me... I've got a fire goin on
Deep down inside of me... I've got a fire goin on
Part of me wants to sing about the light...
Part of me wants to cry, cry cry
Part of me wants to sing about the light...
Part of me wants to cry, cry cry