

“Taste that the Lord Is Good”  
May 7, 2023  
Scripture: I Peter 2:2-10; John 14:1-14

It should come as no surprise to any of us that the church today looks a lot different than it did forty or fifty years ago. And by “church” I mean the whole thing, not just our congregation. Fewer people in our society identify as Christian than ever before, at least for as long as that sort of thing has been measured. There are a lot of theories about that, as you may know. It seems clear there are multiple reasons contributing to that trend, some of them demographic, some ideological, some political, some social. There is no single reason for it, so there’s no single way to reverse it.

And it could be reversing the trend isn’t really in the faith’s best interest. We’ve spent many years, centuries really, at the center of power in the West, but has that really been good for us? A strong case can be made that the church has been at its best at times when its power has been the least. Our origin, as we know from letters like First Peter, is on the margins of society. There doesn’t seem to have been a desire or expectation that the church would ever be at the center of things. The writer of First Peter believed that persecution, whether it was social or political or religious, was a way of refining their spirits, strengthening their resolve. It put them in a position to be entirely dependent on God and their faith in Christ, and not on the support of society.

That’s why the writer can say with such conviction they have “tasted that the Lord is good.” In spite of the difficulties they’ve been through, the rejection or hostility they’ve received from their neighbors or the authorities, they’ve remained steadfast in their commitment to Christ and maintained a community of love and support to give them hope. In a world where it would be so much easier to just walk away under that kind of pressure, these communities have endured. That’s no small feat. They were people willing to risk their status, their relationships, even at times their safety because what they’d found was so much better; they’d tasted that the Lord is good.

I think every generation of Christians is challenged to act on that encounter. When we experience the goodness of the Lord in our lives, what are we called to do in the world? How do we share that goodness? The main things that come to mind, I suppose, are the ways we reach out to people in need around us. When we provide food for people who are hungry or support for people who are homeless, when we offer companionship to people who are lonely or forgotten, we’re sharing God’s goodness with them.

Those all feel like normal things for churches to do, and they’re all important. No one criticizes us when we offer that kind of relief. There’s no risk to it, no threat of persecution. But what happens when, as a church, we begin to question why people are hungry or homeless or neglected? The thing about the communities being written to in First Peter was their presence and their practices were a critique of their society. By saying “Jesus is Lord,” the fundamental claim of all Christians, they were implying that Caesar, and the system built around the worship of Caesar, was not. That’s what put them at risk. When the church today critiques the systems

that perpetuate poverty or racism or fear-induced hate, we put ourselves at risk. We no longer rely on the goodwill of society for our security but put our trust in God alone.

Because we have tasted the Lord is good, we can't stay silent while immigrant and refugee communities are threatened or rejected. When we advocate on behalf of people looking for a better more secure life through our support of Journey's End or Jericho Road and Vive la Casa, we're risking offending those in our community who are convinced that refugees and non-European immigrants are part of a conspiracy to replace white people in our country. You may have heard that last week the trial began for the shooter who killed nine people at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh in 2018. Part of his motive was his opposition to an organization called HIAS, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society. Because they are a Jewish-based organization, he targeted a synagogue. There's risk in advocating for refugees and immigrants of color in our society right now, but it's a risk we take because we've tasted the Lord is good.

Every now and then we've received phone calls here questioning why we have a rainbow on our sign in the front and why we have a rainbow banner that says "All Are Welcome" at our door. I personally received a call from someone offended that we've hosted the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus here in the sanctuary. Because we have tasted the Lord is good, we're allies to the LGBTQ community who have been targeted by state governments, restricting access to gender-affirming care or banning discussions of sexuality in classrooms and transgender kids' participation in sports in schools. By being a place of safety and acceptance and inclusion we put ourselves at risk of offending those who want to keep our LGBTQ sisters and brothers isolated and hidden out of fear. Because the Lord is good, we are all created good, so we can love one another as we are, just as God loves us.

Right now we have a message on our sign urging the community to "unite against white supremacy." Even a message like that, which sounds like commonsense, is offensive to some and puts us at risk. But because we've tasted the Lord is good, we stand with people of color who have been targeted with violence. Next Sunday is the first anniversary of the Tops Market massacre that took the lives of ten people in the Black community and wounded three others. It was an act of hatred driven by a belief in white supremacy that many churches in our country have perpetuated and tolerated for too long. We stand against it because we've tasted the Lord is good and we're called to reject ideologies rooted in ignorance and fear.

In those ways, by being advocates for people our society wants to regulate or reject or devalue, we risk persecution in much the same way the First Peter community did. That's why the writer felt the need to encourage them, to help them realize they weren't alone in their struggle to be true to their convictions. It's easier to give in, to turn a blind eye to injustice, to withhold compassion. But that would deny God's hold on our lives. We've tasted the Lord is good, so we put our trust in God, as Jesus urged his disciples, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me." He calls us to discover the way, truth and life he reveals by becoming one with him and risking the path he walks, the path of compassion, justice and love. It may not make us popular but it will fill us and make us whole. So we have nothing to fear.

*Nothing can trouble, nothing can frighten;  
Those who trust in God will never go wanting.  
Nothing can trouble, nothing can frighten;  
God alone fills us.*

Amen