

This weekend the Vestry and I
were on retreat at Honey Creek,
along with the vestries
of 6 other congregations.

Bishop Logue and his staff
led the retreat,
and I'm so glad we went.

The bishop started off
our conversation with
a list of three things to consider:

What a Vestry *must* do,
What a Vestry *can* do,
and What your vestry *might* do

The first was the list of
canonical responsibilities
Vestries are required to fulfill.

At the top of that list, though,
The bishop added something
that isn't in the canons -
Keep Jesus at the center.
That caught my attention.

And he was right,
even if the canons
don't say it outright -
Jesus ought to be
at the center of everything we do.

If we forget that,
if we forget Jesus,
then we're just another non-profit,
trying to do stuff that honestly,
lots of other non-profits
are better at.

Jesus is really all
we have to offer.

After going through
some other things Vestries must,

can, or might do,
he had us break into our own groups

To discuss not the topics
he had just given us,
but to “Name a time
your congregation showed up for you.

There was a second, follow up, question,
but - this may come as a surprise to you,
your Vestry likes to talk,
and we didn’t get to it.

Honestly,
that conversation was the highlight
of the weekend for me.
I learned things about everyone
gathered around the table.

I heard stories of how this parish
responded to folks,
in times of difficulty and sorrow,
in times of joy or of uncertainty.

I heard stories about how
you showed up when
people first walked in the door,
and about after they had been here
for a long time.

I treat what i hear
in these settings as confidential,
so I’m not going to name any names,
or share any details
of what was said.

In fact,
I didn’t intend, initially,
to mention this at all today,

And then,
yesterday morning,
I was trying to wrap my head around
an explanation of how you
restore saltiness once it’s been lost -

If you know that, by the way,
please let me know,
because i still have no idea
what Jesus was trying to say there

When i remembered the next lines
in today's Gospel lesson -

You are the light of the world, and,
so let your light shine on others,
that they may see,
and give glory to your Father
in heaven.

I'm not exaggerating when i say,
it was a revelation, you know,
like a light came on in my head.

Without breaking any confidences,
I want you to hear what i heard
in our small group.

Folks talked about how
hard it can be in all sorts of
circumstances,
to feel welcome,
to feel like you belong,

It can take time
to get to know people,
and then something happens -

Remember, folks shared
both happy times
and very difficult ones,

But in all those times,
when something happened,
you people literally showed up -
yes, the clergy usually did, too,
and that mattered,

But what they mostly talked about
was y'all - how *you* were there,
when things happened.

Sometimes they didn't know,
how you got there,
or how you even knew to come,
but there you were.

And when you arrived,
you came to meet their needs,
and not your own.

Sometimes,
the gifts you brought were immediate,
but at other times,
you were patient, timely, and gentle.

You were also persistent,
though, and you didn't
give up on people.

One of my favorite things,
that someone said,
which i think gets at all of them -
and i probably won't get this
exactly right -
It may not be exactly
what was said,
but it was what i heard -

They said that you made a safe path
for people to find their way,
and you made a welcome place
for them to stay.

Let me rephrase,
since this is a sermon,
and ought to sound more
overtly religious-

You came not to be served
but to serve,
and you showed people the way,
not to you, necessarily,
but to our Father in Heaven.

Talk about being
the light of the world,

about letting your light shine
before others.

Except, of course,
we know the true
Light of the World
is Jesus,

but when we keep him at the center,
we can shine His light,
on all those around us,
so that they can see
God in their very midst.

It's quite a gift to a preacher,
to be shown by the Vestry,
that the congregation before him,
*is the sermon
he was trying to wrap his head around.

You know, i think all Jesus
was trying to say
to that crowd gathered at the foot
of the mount was this -

If you want to be my disciples,
you need to know
what the job description is.
I'm grateful to serve a parish
who understands
the homework assignment.

There are still
a lot of dark places
in a lot of people's lives, though,
so we remember what
our bishop told us -

Just keep Jesus
at the center,
and keep the light shining.

It's what we must do,
what we can do,
and what God still calls us to do.