

Today I want to preach about a way we can be this salt and light Jesus speaks of. I want to begin with a story from my own spiritual life. I was ordained in 1997 and my first assignment in Tacoma was great. But during those three years a thought kept nagging at me. I had tested my vocation as a Carthusian monk back in 1991, right out of graduate school. I spent a month in Vermont at the monastery, but didn't feel called to the solitary life of a hermit-monk. But now, as a priest, those thoughts came back to me. In 1991 I wasn't very mature spiritually – I hardly knew how to pray. Maybe I hadn't given that vocation a real shot. So, when in the year 2000 the Archbishop asked me to become the Pastor in Port Angeles, I asked him if I could first go back to Vermont and spend the summer at the monastery before I started the new assignment – to check it out. He agreed.

It was a very interesting summer. During the first weeks two things happened. First, I had a growing feeling that God was calling me to the Carthusian life. Second, I also had a growing sense of the scary

nature of the call. I wasn't sure I wanted to be a Carthusian now! The Carthusians really are hermits. They never leave the monastery – and only rarely leave their cell. They see their families two days a year. As these two feelings grew in intensity I remember standing inside my cell door one afternoon waiting for the bell to ring that signaled it was time to go to the chapel for vespers. I clearly recall that moment because it was there that I finally resolved the tension by telling God, yes, I was willing to become a Carthusian. I put myself into His hands.

But almost immediately the feeling that I was called to the hermit life started to dissolve. Within a few days it was obvious to me that I wasn't called to that life, but to the diocesan priesthood. The question was settled in my heart.

“You are the salt of the earth . . . You are the light of the world . . . your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Heavenly Father.” Jesus tells us that we are to season the world. Our lives are to shine and make a difference.

How are we to do that? By asking God a dangerous question: “Lord, what do you want me to do with my life?” Perhaps we think that question is only for the young. We are older and have already chosen what our life is about. We have answered that question. Maybe. But even if we have, that is not a question we ask of God only once in our lives. After 1997 people, including myself at some level, probably figured, “I have settled what God wants me to do with my life. He wants me to be a priest.” But the question came up again in a different way. “Yes, God wants me to be a priest. But does He want me to be a hermit as well?” The dangerous question will never be finally answered until we get to heaven. Throughout our lives we must keep asking the dangerous question. Not just once but over and over again.

Yes, God wants me to be a priest. But beyond that . . . what does God want me to do with my life? If we truly and honestly ask God that question our lives will change radically. And they’re meant to. I felt that standing before that cell door in 2000. I didn’t get the Carthusian part

right in addressing my question that summer. But I got the radical part right. The Carthusians are a worthy answer to the dangerous question, just not my answer.

If we stop asking that question our spiritual life stalls. The only thing more dangerous than asking God what He wants me to do with my life is to not ask the question. The root of much unhappiness and tragedy in our lives comes from never having asked that question – or having stopped asking it. That’s because if we don’t ask the question we probably won’t discover what God has planned for us – and God’s plan for every person is that his or her life glorify Him by making a difference. And that is what being a light for the world means, and what we each want, deep down.

Now, to be clear, asking the question, “Lord, what do you want me to do with my life?” doesn’t mean that we re-open closed questions like our marriage and priesthood. But God will ask us to live out our callings more radically. That summer in Vermont was not wasted. I

wasn't to be a Carthusian, but I was called to be holier parish priest. A summer spent praying over that had a huge impact on me. You may not be called to join Doctors without Borders, etc. But you are called to be a saint wherever you are – whatever that means (and a warning, it will mean change!).

We are meant to be the salt of the earth. We are to be light for the world. That happens when we are filled with grace. And that happens when we give God permission to keep messing with our lives. No matter how old you are – or your state in life, how long has it been since you really asked God the dangerous question, asked it in such a way that you know you mean it, that it feels risky? It's scary to stand before the closed door and say "Yes" to God.

But we are meant to be more than we are right now. God always has a bigger plan for us, and the beautiful thing is that when we ask the dangerous question God always answers it in such a way that our lives shine more brightly and make a bigger difference to the world.