

Rev. Alexa Eisenbarth

2/8/2026

Referencing: [Burn Order Episode 4: Like an Ordinary American](#)

Isaiah 58: 1-9a

Shout out; do not hold back!
Lift up your voice like a trumpet!
Announce to my people their rebellion,
to the house of Jacob their sins.
Yet day after day they seek me
and delight to know my ways,
as if they were a nation that practiced
righteousness
and did not forsake the ordinance of their
God;
they ask of me righteous judgments;
they want God on their side.
“Why do we fast, but you do not see?
Why humble ourselves, but you do not
notice?”
Look, you serve your own interest on your
fast day
and oppress all your workers.
You fast only to quarrel and to fight
and to strike with a wicked fist.
Such fasting as you do today
will not make your voice heard on high.
Is such the fast that I choose,
a day to humble oneself?
Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush

and to lie in sackcloth and ashes?
Will you call this a fast,
a day acceptable to the Lord?

Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the straps of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry
and bring the homeless poor into your
house;
when you see the naked, to cover them
and not to hide yourself from your own
kin?
Then your light shall break forth like the
dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator shall go before you;
the glory of the Lord shall be your rear
guard.
Then you shall call, and the Lord will
answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say,
“Here I am.”

If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of
evil.

Matthew 5: 13-20

“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. People do not light a lamp and put it under the bushel basket; rather, they put it on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke

of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, an 8pm curfew was established here in Washington, and in many places in the West, for all people of Japanese descent. Rachel Maddow helps tell the story of Japanese Internment through a 6 part narrative podcast called Burn Order, highlighting the stories of individuals. One of those individuals is a Japanese-American University of Washington student Gordon Hirabayashi.

In late 1941, early 1942, Rachel Maddow tells the listener: “Gordon Hirabayashi is a 24-year-old senior finishing up his degree in sociology. His parents immigrated to this country from Japan, but Gordon and his siblings were all born here in the U.S. They’re all American citizens.

Gordon is a Quaker. He’s a young man of strong principles and strong religious faith.

Posters have started going up all around Seattle, ordering that anyone of Japanese ancestry has to be off the streets by 8 p.m. Get off the streets, get behind closed doors.

Gordon Hirabayashi at first follows the curfew order. He rushes home from the library or wherever he is. He makes sure he's back inside his dorm room before the clock strikes 8.

He does do that for a while. But then he stops.

Gordon Hirabayashi: I said, "Why am I dashing back when my fellow American dormmates are continuing to do what they were doing?" And you know, the obvious factor of my Japanese ancestry, that's the only reason that differentiated me on this order, and I said to myself, "Gee, if the American Constitution means anything at all, this is wrong. And if I believe in the Constitution, I've got to object to this."

He starts to defy the order, openly. But no one catches him. No one notices. No one arrests him. But this wasn't really a good thing for him as someone who wanted to resist the order, not only for himself, but on behalf of others.

And so when another order was given, the order for all people of Japanese descent to load themselves into buses and trains to be detained in camps, Gordon does not get on the bus.

Again, he doesn't want to just get away with defying the order, he wants his defiance to be noticed in order that it might change something. And so, he writes a letter.

Here's a bit of what he wrote: "This order for the mass evacuation of all persons of Japanese descent denies them the right to live. It forces thousands of energetic, law-abiding individuals to exist in a miserable psychological and horrible physical atmosphere. This order limits to almost full extent the creative expressions of those subjected. It kills the desire for a higher life. Hope for the future is exterminated. Human personalities are poisoned. The very qualities which are essential to a peaceful, creative community are being thrown out and abused. Over sixty percent are American citizens; yet they are denied on a wholesale scale without due process of law the civil liberties which are theirs. If I were to register and cooperate under these circumstances, I would be giving helpless consent to the denial of practically all of the things which give me incentive to live. I consider it my duty to maintain the democratic standards for which this nation lives. Therefore, I must refuse this order for evacuation."

Signed, "Gordon K. Hirabayashi."

—

A few years ago, chef Samin Nosrat published a book along with a Netflix limited series called *Salt, Fat, Acid, Heat*. The episode on Salt opens with, “Salt. It’s fundamental to all good cooking. It enhances flavor, and it even makes food taste more like itself. In short, salt brings food to life. Learn to use it well, and your food will taste great.” Salt, of course, has other purposes, like preservation, changing the freezing or boiling point of water/ice, tenderizing, slowing the fermentation of yeast in bread, and more. But seasoning food with salt to enhance the flavor of food, Samin Nosrat says, is one of the “few elements that unites all cuisines.” As people of faith, then, we might deduce that our role as *salt of the earth* people is to be the kind of people who help others be more of themselves; that our presence as followers of Christ in our communities should have a salt-like effect, enhancing what is already there to be more fully what and who it was made to be, a practice that could unite people in all times and places.

Harvesting salt happens a bit differently in different places, depending on the environment. In Japan, salt is harvested from seawater using seaweed. In Oregon, it is harvested from seawater through concentration and evaporation. Other places, like the Middle East, harvest salt through solar evaporation; enlisting the sun in the process. Himalayan Pink Salt is mined from mountains. But in every place, salt is both foundational and hidden. It is the structure of mountains, the salinity of the sea. It's under rock, it's dissolved in water.

We might think that this is especially different or in conflict with the next encouragement to be the light of the world, seemingly very visible; especially as it follows up with the image of being a city on a hill - unable to be hidden. However, light is also foundational and hidden. Have you ever been working outside until dusk, and as the light fades, you hardly notice, until at some point you realize that the task at hand is much more difficult because of the fading light. It is not the light of day that is *seen* but light is foundational to being able to see. But the process of harvesting salt brings it into usefulness, into visibility. Salt is not living into its fullest purpose until it is harvested and put to use. Light enables sight by reflecting off of objects – light under a bushel does not enable sight for anyone.

To be salt and light, heeding these instructions, means putting ourselves to use to enable people to see more clearly and be more fully who they were created to be, not to be hidden away in mountains or seawater or under bushels, but radiate, season, marinate, tenderize; be put to doing.

If salt helps food taste more like itself, and we are the salt of the earth, then how would we cheer on policies that “limits to almost full extent the creative expressions of those subjected”... that “kills the desire for a higher life”... that exterminated hope for the future? Why would we like or share posts, why would we use language or engage one another in a way that poisons human personalities?

what is it, beyond metaphor, that we *should* be put to doing? What is it that helps people become more fully who they were created to be? What is it that must be done to give people greater vision, clarity, transparency, enlightenment?

What should we be “put to doing?” as John Wesley says in the Wesleyan Covenant Prayer.

—

The people Isaiah prophesies to are asking a question: what can we do that will get God's attention? This question is not asked with true humility and openness, but it seems with a little resentment. If it were today, it might sound like: I have crosses hanging in my home and I bought a sign that says "as for me and my house we will serve the Lord," and I carry around my Bible with me, and I tell strangers in public 'God Bless You' ... God, what more could I possibly do to get you to pay attention to me? What can I do to get a response from you?

And God responds to this question with a parental correction.

"You perform your faith in public so that everyone can see, but you consider service workers "the help" and treat them like garbage, you fight against fair wages, you vote for your own self-interests alone - you lift up people into high office who hate the poor and seek to make them even poorer. And then you call for me? This is not what I've asked for."

The Message version translates God's call this way:

This is the kind of fast day I'm after:

to break the chains of injustice,
get rid of exploitation in the workplace,
free the oppressed,
cancel debts.

What I'm interested in seeing you do is:

sharing your food with the hungry,
inviting the homeless poor into your homes,
putting clothes on the shivering ill-clad,
being available to your own families.

Do this and the lights will turn on,

and your lives will turn around at once.

Your righteousness will pave your way.

The GOD of glory will secure your passage.

Then when you pray, GOD will answer.

You'll call out for help and I'll say, 'Here I am.'

—

“[Gordon Hirabayashi] spends five months in jail awaiting trial. At trial, he is convicted. The judge sentences him to 90 days in a federal work camp in Tucson, Arizona.”

Historian Frank Abe recounts: The judge says, “Fine, here’s your — you’re sentenced for 90 days and you must report to the work camp in Tucson, Arizona. But we have no way of transporting you there.” And Gordon said, “Well, can I – if I can get there on my own, will you let me serve my time in the work camp?” And they go, “Okay, fella, best of luck to you.” So Gordon Hirabayashi, in fact, hitchhiked from the Northwest down to Arizona.”

Gordon Hirabayashi is so determined to oppose what the government is doing, so determined to be jailed for refusing to go along with it, as a matter of principle, that he hitchhikes across multiple states to get himself to prison. He sleeps in ditches on the side of the road along the way.

Only to find when he arrives in Tucson that this prison, this federal work camp, they have no idea what to do with him.

Frank Abe: Gordon Hirabayashi showed up at the work camp in Tucson, and the authorities there had not been notified and so did not know who he was or what he was doing there.

Rachel Maddow: Prison officials have no record of who he is or why he's supposed to report to them. They tell him, "Hey, why don't you just get out of here? Why don't you just go home?"

Gordon tells them, "I cannot go home."

But they won't let him stay. He takes himself into town, into Tucson. He has dinner. He thinks about it, and then he goes back to the prison to insist that they must take him into custody.

Frank Abe: He had to, like, show his papers and argue that he had been sentenced to serve time there. And eventually they took him in.

Rachel Maddow: It was clear that Japanese Americans were pretty much on their own contending with this thing.

So Gordon Hirabayashi thought, "Well, why not me? I'll do it."

—

This week, I seek to model my life after the Gordon Hirabayashis of this world, who pattern their life after Christ - the one who calls us to be in such solidarity with those shackled by the oppressive, fascist, imperial powers of this world that use the same tools over and over again to convince us to hate each other.

What are we to be put to doing? We are to be put to doing justice so that our neighbors can be more themselves. Injustice, oppression, heavy yokes are contaminants that make people lose their flavor, their zest for life, their joy, their humanity.

I seek to model my life after the Isaiah's of this world, after the salt of the earth kind of people who employ themselves for the work of helping people be more and more of themselves; the city on a hill kind of people who do not do their good works in the dark for the purposes of making themselves feel better, but who insist on shining a light on what is wrong, what is unjust

in the world. I seek to listen for God's voice in people like Gordon who, like God, say "Here I am. Why not me? I'll do it."

—

