

Matthew 5:13-16 (Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany—Series A)
“You are Salt and Light”
Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield, CT
February 5, 2023

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text is the opening words of today’s Gospel reading from Matthew 5, the Sermon on the Mount:

¹³You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, with what will [the earth] be salted? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown outside and trampled on by the people. ¹⁴You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill is not able to be hidden; ¹⁵neither do they light a lamp and place it under a basket, but on the stand, and it shines on all those in the house. ¹⁶In this way, shine your light before people, so that they might see your good works and glorify your Father who is in the heavens.

Mark Kurlansky has written a whole book on salt. The title says it all: *Salt: A World History*. Believe it or not, it was a pretty good read. Certainly, a topic I never thought much about, how salt has been used pretty much since God created it! Salt preserves. Because salt prevents decay, it protects from harm. “In the early Middle Ages, farmers in northern Europe learned to save their grain harvest from a devastating fungal infection called ergot, poisonous to humans and livestock, by soaking the grain in salt brine.”¹

Our Lord Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount uses salt as a metaphor for the lives of His disciples. He says to His followers—to Christians— “You are the salt of the earth.” Salt preserves. Salt protects from harm. So do Jesus’ disciples as they live out their lives of faith and trust in the Savior, seasoning the world with the Good News of Jesus who saves from sin and death by giving forgiveness and eternal life.

¹ Mark Kurlansky, *Salt: A World History* (2002), 8.

Our Lord quickly changes to another metaphor to illustrate the nature of the believer's life. "You are the light of the world." Light casts out darkness. Darkness is associated with evil, with danger, with the condition of being lost and unable to find one's way. Jesus' disciples—because they have become HIS disciples—*are* the world's light, because in Jesus, light has begun to shine: "The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned" (Matt. 4:16 ESV).

You who are disciples of Jesus, who trust in Jesus through the Holy Spirit's gift of saving faith, are also salt and light for this world, for this community. How did you get to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world? You didn't fill out an application. You didn't go to school to earn a degree. No, Jesus Himself called you with the authority of His word, "Follow Me." When? For most of us, at our Baptism, when God put His Triune Name upon you and me with the authority of His Word of Promise, "In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Your heavenly Father claimed you as His child. By means of Baptism, the Holy Spirit created saving faith in your hearts to believe in Jesus Christ, God's Son, as your only Savior from sin, Satan, and the power of death. Your faith in Jesus is God's gift to you through the Gospel Word and the waters of Holy Baptism. He claimed you as His child, making you a follower—a disciple—of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Each one of you, then, is a disciple because of Jesus' forgiveness purchased and won for you with His death and resurrection and because of the blessings of eternal life and salvation bestowed upon you along with that forgiveness. Jesus, **the** Light of the world, which enlightens everyone, came into this tasteless and dark world of sin and evil and

redeemed it. His death purchased and won us from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil. In Baptism, the authoritative voice of the Lord Jesus called you as His disciple. Through the Gospel Word read and proclaimed in your hearing, Jesus teaches you. He blesses you and strengthens you by the Good News of His life, death, and resurrection so that in Him, by faith, you have received your calling and identity.

Since Jesus has made you children of the heavenly Father and called you with His authority as His disciples, it is Jesus who decided the nature of your calling. And so, you are that which salts the earth. You are that which gives light to the world. Christians, by definition, then, are people who salt the earth and light the world with the Good News of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins. Now here's a sobering fact: no one else, only believers in Jesus, have this calling!

What does Jesus warn if a disciple turns away and rejects his or her Christ-given calling as a disciple? Such a person would "become tasteless." Tasteless salt is worthless. Saltless salt isn't even salt! It's no good. Throw it out and let the people walk on it with the rest of the cobblestones! To reject our calling as Christians to be salt of the earth and light of the world brings about a tragedy because no means would remain for the earth to receive the necessary blessings of the Gospel! Not only does rejecting our calling as disciples bring a crushing blow to our personal faith, it has impacts on the people around us as we would fail to bring the salt of the Gospel and the light of Christ to them through our words and actions. Ultimately, when we fail to live out our calling as disciples means rejecting Jesus Himself because we then fail to be God's means of blessing the world around us. And that's what we are here to do as Christians. We are saved by Christ alone

so that we might be empowered by God the Holy Spirit to make disciples by baptizing and teaching others who will become disciples who make disciples.

Being tempted not to fulfill our calling as Christians is, Jesus says, like lighting a lamp and covering it with a basket. That serves about as much of a good purpose as saltless salt! As the old Sunday School song asks, "Hide it under a bushel? No! I'm gonna let it shine." You see, something happened to you and me that transformed us from saltless, tasteless people who were in the darkness of sin, evil, and death into the salt of the earth and the light of world. Something happened to cause you and me to become salt that brings light to a world of darkness. That something was, as we have heard, the call of Jesus to be His disciples.

You are essential for the work of bringing people to repentance and faith by announcing the Good News that in Jesus Christ alone the reign of heaven stands near. You are that which salts the earth and lights the world! You live out Jesus' calling in your own vocation as you are God's means for blessing the world around you. You are called in your baptism to be extraordinary husbands and wives, parents and children. You are called to be remarkable neighbors and employees. Jesus has called you to be powerful friends and citizens. Your deeds and your words, in the power of faith and the Holy Spirit, will be like salt and light in the darkness. You season the tasteless world with love and grace and peace that can only be found in Jesus. You bring the light of eternal life and the hope of salvation in Christ to people who are surrounded by death and hopelessness. You salt the earth and light the world with your words and your actions in Jesus' name, giving glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Each believing man, woman, child, layperson, and pastor stands as a disciple because of Jesus' forgiveness and blessing received in Holy Baptism. We each receive Jesus' calling to be salt and light and the power of His Holy Spirit to be what He has called us to be. Ask the Lord to open up opportunities for you to share the Good News of Jesus in word and action. Don't be shy to invite someone to the Divine Service so that they might hear the Word in our midst, join with us in prayer and praise, and enjoy the faith of believers in Jesus. Pray God to enable you to offer hope and peace and love to others in any kind of need, the love, peace, and hope of Jesus. Go from the Lord's house this day empowered by Christ's Word and Sacrament as you continue to be beneficial blessings to people as the salt and light that you already are. Amen.