

Written: Matthew 5:13-16 “Living in a Tasteless and Darkened World”

5th Sunday @ Epiphany

Sunday, February 5th, 2023

Text: Matthew 5:13-16

¹³ "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. ¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

The text's intent

Jesus commanding His Church, those who have been given faith in Him, to be what His Spirit makes us in conversion; salt and light to the world. And we are those things through the good works that witness our faith in Christ and the love God has for all men. The Spirit in our heart through the love of Christ we've been given is the impetus for this, moving us to see and feel the need around us and react. The Law works to guide us in what loving God and others should look like, and to move us to repentance and continued work at being salt and light when we fail and try to give up.

Focus Statement:

Through the work of conversion Jesus calls us into the reign and rule of His Church and makes us to be salt and light. The Spirit's work in our hearts through the Gospel is what gives us the power, ability, and desire to be salt and light. He opens our eyes to see the needs of others. He provides the guidance of His Law so that we might know how to be salt and light: how to love others as Jesus has first loved us.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

Christ calls us to be His Church in order to do works that are salt and light to the world around us. But these aren't always comfortable things for us. We can see this as an optional thing for us, or as something we must do to earn His favor, and then be overcome by guilt because we don't do enough.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Allow the Spirit to continue to work through the Law as the mirror that shows us our failures, the Gospel that moves us to repentance, and the Law as our guide in what it means to live as salt and light, not to earn God's favor, but because we are in right standing through Jesus' gift of His righteousness.

Subject Sentence: By the power of the Spirit, Live as Salt and Light

Introduction: How Do You Feel About Salt and Light?

Jesus in our Gospel Lesson is talking to us, His Church, all who believe in Him, about “salt” and “light”.

How much do you like salt? As my family will attest to, I love salt. I love salt on eggs, steak, potatoes, goulash, as well as other pasta dishes. So of course, I am occasionally reprimanded for the amount of salt I use; especially when I salt things before I even taste them. But between you and me, there have been very few times I’ve pre-salted a meal only to find I’ve gone overboard. Now I must tell those of you who love salt as much as I do, and hear the same reprimand that I hear, that Jesus words to us today do not excuse us to salt food as much as we want. I tried using this verse with my family physician who is a Christian and he wasn’t buying it. He reminded me there are health ramifications for overindulgence in salt such as high blood pressure, heart attack, and strokes.

Well, how about the light? Are you someone who enjoys sitting in a well-lit room? Or do you enjoy mood lighting? I’m not one to turn on every light in the house. Growing up I was taught that I should always turn off the light when I leave the room. So at the Parsonage we usually only have the lights on in the room we are sitting in, and even then not every one of them. It’s better for watching most TV shows when it’s kind of dark. And there is something relaxing about sitting in a room with a light on over you to read, with all the others turned off, except for the light and crackle of a fire.

Well, that’s me. But then there is one of my daughters. When she comes over it doesn’t take long for all of the lights to be turned on everywhere in the house. She goes from room to room turning lights on, sometimes murmuring to herself about how anyone can live when it’s so dark in the house. Jesus words in our Gospel Lesson don’t support having all the lights on in the house.

Jesus Makes us Salt and Light

Matthew 5:13 "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet."

So, what is Jesus saying? He is telling us to be salt in a tasteless world, and to be light in a sin darkened world. And certainly, the world we live in is both. We can see that when we turn on the news. We can see it in the anger, the bitterness, and the division that marks our relationships with one another. But what does it really mean to be salt and light? And how can we go about being that? Being salt and light means being a witness to the grace and love we have from Christ by faith, and through that witness make a difference in the world around us. It means to be sharing the light that is the Gospel Message with those the Lord puts in our path. And that is not something most of us are comfortable doing.

I'm a procrastinator by nature, especially with those things I really don't want to do or I am uncomfortable doing. I figure sometimes that if I put something off long enough, it might just fade away, or people will forget I was supposed to do it, or someone else might come along and do it for me and save me the anguish of having to do it myself. How much more so being salt and light?

In these verses Jesus is not giving us a choice or an option. He is not saying go be salt and light when you feel like it. He is not telling us to go be something we are not. He is telling us to be something that is difficult for us, even impossible on our own. That is impossible on our own. He is not telling us to "Go get salty". He is telling you He has already done that to you and in you. He says, "**You are salt**", because it is He who has made you salty. He made you salty when He sent His Spirit into your heart and life through the Gospel Message. Through that message He made you to know who your Savior is and all that He has done for you to save you from eternal death, forgiving your sins, and giving you His Spirit to live with you, guiding you every day. Knowing that to be true makes your life so much better than living as the world lives, trying to find things that take their minds of the meaningless existence that is life without God, without faith, without hope. That is worse than tasteless. But just as salt makes tasteless food taste better, sharing our faith and hope in Christ helps make the world and those around us a better place. And salt was used for something else in Jesus' day; it was used as a preservative. When we share the Gospel Message, the faith created by the Holy Spirit works to preserve the lives of all who believe unto life everlasting.

Matthew 5:14-15 ¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.

In the same way Jesus doesn't tell us to become light. He came to be the light of the world. And through our faith connection with Him we also become the light of the world. He came to us in our baptism to save us out of the devil's domain of darkness by paying the ransom price that was His blood shed in your place and His body given into eternal suffering in your place. He has saved you by calling you into His reign and rule, His kingdom, His Church. In the Old and New Testament, a lampstand is symbolic of the Church and the work the Spirit does through us to be the light of Christ. As His Church we have been planted right here to be His light shining out in the darkness, like a city set on a hill, so that those who are stumbling around in the darkness of unbelief might be drawn to us, and so be drawn to our Lord and Savior. He calls us to be salt and light so that they might be drawn to faith in Him in the same manner we once were, through the Spirit working through the Word, by the witness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Doing the Works that Make us Salt and Light

Matthew 5:16 *In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*

Well, that's all well and good you might say. Being salt and light is OK for the Pastor, that's his job, and for those who like doing that sort of thing, But not for me. But Jesus is not making this an option, He's not saying when or if you feel like it. "**Let your light shine**" is actually a word of command, an imperative statement He is saying to you and me, "***I've made you to be salt, I've made you to be light. Go out and be salty and shine the light of my Gospel before others.***"

And how exactly do we do this? By letting the world around us see our good works. And what are these good works that give glory to God? They may not be what the world wants you to do. An addict might want you to give them money so they can buy more drugs. Someone who is stealing from a neighbor might want you to look the other way. Someone who is able bodied and could hold a job might want you to support them so that they don't have to work. But are doing those things giving glory to God or really sharing His love with that person?

Jesus is encouraging us to be guided by the 10 commandments so that we might know what kind of good works glorify God. **Matthew 22:37-40** ³⁷ "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." By using the 10 Commandments as a guide we can know what are works that the Lord considers to be truly good. It means to honor our father and mother, and those in authority over us, living in obedience to those laws that do not contradict the Word of God and encouraging others to do the same: to be good citizens. It means not only not murdering anyone, but to also protect the lives of others, especially those who cannot speak or help themselves such as the poor, the migrants, the widows, and the unborn. It means sacrificing our time, talents, and treasures to help those who are in need such as at Franklin Mission, and contributing to the collection for Heartbeat Crib. It not only means don't commit adultery, but that we should encourage our neighbor to take the vows of holy matrimony seriously and advise them to be faithful to one another. It means encouraging those living together to tie the knot. It means helping those who are struggling in their marriage by providing childcare so stressed-out parents can have some time to themselves. It doesn't just mean "Do not steal". It means watching out for our neighbors belongings and helping him to keep, protect, and care for them. It doesn't just mean "Do not bear false witness". It means never gossip about your neighbor, but instead defend them, speak well of them, put the best spin on things, never share hearsay and encourage others to follow suit. And in all these things, it includes sharing our faith in Christ while we do it.

The Spirit's Work to Keep us Salty and Full of Light

These are not easy things for us to do. Frankly they don't come natural to us. That's because we still have that sinful heart alive inside us. All of those things require a sacrifice of our time, talents, and treasures, and our sinful selfish heart doesn't always like to do that. We don't mind doing it for those we like, for those who like us. But it's another thing to sacrifice for strangers we don't know, who may not even like us. How can we be motivated to do these good works that truly glorify God?

Thanks be to God for the Holy Spirit at work inside of us. He is at work through His Strong Word to draw us back to loving and serving our Lord when our sinful heart would call us to stray away. It is His work in your heart and life that moves you to love the Lord Your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. He does that as He reminds you through the Gospel, through the means of grace, just how much Christ has done for you, and just how much He loves you. He uses the Law to point out the ways in which you and I don't want to be salt and light. He points out the opportunities we procrastinated on or said no to. He points them out, moves us to confess and repent, then moves us to get up and try again, knowing and believing we are forgiven for our all of our failures.

He provides new opportunities, or sometimes the same ones again. He puts people in our path as we go out and live our life roles (our vocations) that He has given us. He brings opportunity through the ministry we do as Lamb of God to show love to one another and to the community around us. Through the means of grace, He continues to pour the love of Christ into our lives, which is the power by which we can be that salt and light He has made us to be as members of His kingdom, His Church, believers in Him.

Conclusion

Using too much salt can have dire health consequences for you. Not being salty enough in Jesus' kingdom can also have dire consequences: being thrown out and trampled on in eternal death. We may like lights on in our house, but that doesn't mean we are comfortable being Jesus' light shining out into the world. It's not about doing things that are comfortable for you. It's about sacrificing your time, talents, and treasures in service to Jesus. It's about His love being poured into your heart through the Gospel. It's about holding by faith all that He has done for you in His life, death, and resurrection. It's about the difference that faith in Him has made in your life. And it's about the desire His Spirit is at work to plant and grow in your heart to share that life changing message, that Strong Word, with those who need to hear it. It's about those people and opportunities He puts before you, the doors of opportunity He is holding open for you, It's about the times we say no, and the repentance He works in our heart over them. May the Spirit be working and active in your life this day, through the means of grace poured out here in worship, to draw you ever closer to Him in love and service, making you salt and light in this dark and tasteless world. Amen.