

Written Copy: Matthew 5:13-16 “Do I Have to be Salt and Light?”

The 5th Sunday @ Epiphany

Sunday, February 8th, 2026

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.

Exegetical Statement

Jesus is preaching to those disciples who are following Him. He describes their life of being disciples as that of being salt that makes a difference in a bland world. Having been made salt by the Spirit how can they be tasteless? They are also being made lights of the Gospel. What good are lights if they are going to conceal that Gospel witness? They are to shine forth their faith in Jesus through good works focused on others who will then give glory to God as the Spirit works through their word and witness. To be these things is God's command to us. Jesus did not come to nullify or weaken any of God's commands, but instead to fulfill in our place. Anyone who nullifies God's Law or weakens it to make it easier to keep or less convicting is working against the Spirit, and considered least in the reign and rule of God. But those who teach the full force of God's Law and then witness the full force of the Gospel, what Jesus has done in our place, will be called great in His reign and rule. Our own right standing could never be good enough in God's eyes, just as the Pharisees and Scribes was not. But Jesus came to earn right standing for us and give that to us as the gift of faith in Him.

Focus Statement:

Jesus was always salt and light wherever He went and in whatever He did. Through His teaching and preaching the Holy Spirit changed hearts and minds bringing them to faith in Him, changing people's love from being self-centered to being Christ-centered, and other centered. His Spirit given us in the Gospel is the powerful force at work to move us to center our lives on serving Him and others by being salt and light through the use of our time, talents, and treasures in a tasteless sin darkened world, and thus be tools of the Holy Spirit to change others around us and keep one another in repentant faith.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

When we came to faith, we were made to be Gospel salt and light. But there are times we choose not to be: choose to serve ourselves instead of Him who saved us.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Be ready and willing to examine our life of faith, confess and repent of those times we choose not to be Gospel salt and light. And in that the Spirit works to grow our willingness and effectiveness as salt and light for Jesus.

Subject Sentence: Christ makes us and keeps us Gospel salt and light

Introduction: Being Salt

I've discovered that when it's slippery outside due to freezing rain or snow there are two dangerous parts to my walk from the parsonage to church. One is that ramp from the sidewalk up to the parking lot, and the other is the sidewalk just before the front door into the Church. What I've discovered is this winter hack: I put the leash on Gideon and tell him, "Go Churchy!" He is so excited to get over here and see if any of his girlfriends are here to give him treats that he will pull me all the way up to the door! The slipperiness doesn't bother him since he has four-wheel (actually 'four paw') drive.

But when I get in the door, one of the most satisfying and assuring things to see is that bin full of salt sitting right by the front door, ready to be spread and keep others from slipping and falling. Conversely seeing that bin almost empty and hearing snowy weather is coming can make me a little worried. It's a good and satisfying thing to have a bin full of salt. But what good would it be if that bin remained full because we never put any out on the sidewalk? Why on earth might we do that? Well, I might reason it's not really slippery enough to warrant using salt, and we have to save it for the really bad ice storms. Or I could reason that if people wanted a salted sidewalk, they could bring their own.

Now both of those excuses are selfish and idiotic. If we have salt for the sidewalk we need to use it. But can our life in Christ ever resemble having salt but leaving it in the bin?

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."

Here Jesus is preaching the Sermon on the Mount, addressing His disciples and followers, those who believe in Him. That means He is addressing you and I as members of His Church who confess faith in Him. He says our lives lived out in faith should be like salt. Salt has numerous uses: it makes food taste better, it is a preservative, and here in our world it melts ice and provides traction. What kind of salt do you have if it has lost its taste, has lost its saltiness? Isn't that an inherent quality that makes those white granular crystals what we call salt? If what we have in that bin by the door has lost all the characteristics that salt is supposed to have, especially the ability to melt ice and give traction, what good is it? It isn't even any good for throwing on the ground and letting people trample on it. It's a bin full of worthlessness that might as well be thrown in the trash heap. Can that ever be a description of our life of faith and service to Christ?

Being Lights

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."

We have lights for the Church parking lot and the entrance to the Church that work on a sensor. When the natural light outside fades to a certain point they turn on. I've seen them come on during the day in the summer when a thunderstorm is rolling in and it turns really dark outside. This system is very useful because otherwise, if they had to be manually turned on, someone would have to walk into Church in the dark to do so. Or, they would have to be left on all day and night, and that would mean a very expensive electric bill. Having them on at night means they are always on whenever anyone comes to Church at night. It also means that those who might want to be up to no good can't do so in a darkened Church parking lot. But how effective would that be if we decided to turn the lights off at night when no one is here just to save some money?

A flashlight that works is a very handy tool to have. Even when the power is off you have light shining out into the darkness showing you the way to check the circuit breaker or find your phone to call and check with Consumers about a power outage. But a flashlight that won't turn on and shine, even when the batteries have been replaced is no good to anyone. You might as well toss that into the trash can.

Jesus tells us that as His followers we are to be lights shining out into a darkened sinful world. But how often are our lives lived out in Christ more like the lamp hidden under the basket?

Being Salt and Light Is Not a Choice

Notice in this section of Jesus sermon He makes statements of fact: **"You are the salt of the earth"** and **"You are the light of the world"**. These are not things Christians choose to be, this is what you are to be as a believer in Him.

When Jesus called you to be a follower of Him, when the Holy Spirit came into your life and your heart through the Gospel message preached, read, or sung; or when that Gospel Message was joined by the Spirit's power to the waters of baptism, He dramatically changed who you are. You once were someone that was turned in on yourself. Your life was all about "me": my life, my time, my money. If it was something you wanted to do, and it benefited you, then you were all for it. If not then let whoever it is that needs something bring their own salt, their own flashlight.

But the Holy Spirit invades your heart with a love that is "other centered", because it comes from the Savior who lived His life "other centered". Jesus made His life and ministry about others even in exclusion to what was good and needful for Him personally. He was focused on teaching, and healing, and providing for others, even at the expense of His own times of rest and sleep. He dedicated His life to being salt and light to all He encountered.

His love is so “other-centered” it is sacrificial. And the greatest example of how powerful that sacrificial love is was when Jesus willingly became the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world, suffering and dying for me and for you, atoning for all those times and ways we are self-centered and uncaring of others. He didn’t have to do that. He wanted to be that atoning sacrifice for you because He loves you so very much.

That’s the love that invades your heart when the Holy Spirit comes into your life and brings you to faith. He changes and recreates your heart to make it a heart like Jesus; a heart that is centered on your Savior and your love for Him for all He has done. It’s a heart that the Spirit moves to be centered on others as He manifests the Fruits of the Spirit in your life.

Galatians 5:22-23 ²² **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,** ^{23a} **gentleness, self-control.** These heart attitudes that the Spirit engenders and grows in our lives will manifest themselves in words and actions that make us salt and light in a world that is lacking the sacrificial love of Christ.

You and I didn’t choose to believe in Jesus, He chose you and planted faith in your heart to believe in Him. You didn’t choose to be salt and light to the world, that is a work of the Holy Spirit in you as you live out your life of faith. He has called you into His body on earth, the Church, and has directed you to this particular congregation. He graciously gives you time, talents and treasures to use in being salt and light to others in this place.

We Can and Do at Times Choose Not to be Salt and Light

While you and I didn’t choose to be salt and light followers of Jesus, we can and do at times choose not to be. How can that be? Because we have that sinful selfish heart that is still active inside us. It wants what it wants. It is self-centered, always ready to claim that *“my time is my time, and my gifts and talents are mine to do with what I want, and my hard-earned money is mine to do whatever I want with it.”* That sinful selfish heart is more than ready to argue within us that *“Being salt and light is the job of other people, not mine. I don’t have time to help others, I’ve got all my own things to worry about.”* That sinful selfish heart whispers to us that *“Since the Gospel is the free gift of grace, and Christ has done it all, I don’t have to do anything.”*

Paul would beg to differ with us when our sinful selfish heart begs us to turn in on ourselves. **Romans 12:1** **I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.**

We were called to faith to live a new life in Christ where we present our bodies: our time, talents, and treasures, as a living sacrifice. This means that our life lived out in faith is going to include times when we sacrifice our time, talent, and treasures to serve not our sinful selfish heart but serve our Lord and Savior by being salt and light. Worship definitely includes what we do here on Sunday morning. But it shouldn't end here. It includes the using what God has given us to grow His kingdom, not just preserve our own.

What can happen if we continue to ignore the Holy Spirit's call to be a part of the ministry that goes on here in His Church, as well as those opportunities to be salt and light to others in our daily life? What happens to salt that loses its saltiness? What happens to a flashlight that no longer works? They are discarded, thrown away. What can happen to the Christian that continually turns in on themselves refusing the Holy Spirit's call to use just a portion of the time, talents, and treasures that God has graciously given them to be salt and light? They are in danger of falling away from faith. **James 2:14 What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?** James's argument here is that a heart that no longer has any interest in serving God by loving others doesn't really have saving faith. It's a dead faith, not a faith and trust in God. And the destination is eternal suffering.

Jesus Salvation Work Restores Us as Salt and Light

Thanks be to God that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ doesn't want to let that happen. He didn't suffer and die for you to see you fall away and be discarded into the trash can of eternal suffering and death.

He came and lived the perfect life of service, the perfect life of being salt and light that you could not because He knew you and I would be unable to. He gives that life to you, credits it to you before the Father so that you are judged not by your failures but His perfect life of service. And on the cross He took all those times you failed to be salt and light, and those times you refused to use His gracious gifts of time, talent, and treasure, for use building His kingdom; He took all that to the cross where He suffered and died so you are forgiven of it all. And He rose again so that you could know without a doubt that His sacrifice in your place was accepted by the Heavenly Father. He did that all out of the greatest love for you.

That love is the power in your life and mine to rejuvenate in us the desire to be salt and light. It is part of our faith relationship with Him. We study and hear from His Word the ways we are to be salt and light in the lives of others. We acknowledge those times and ways the Spirit points out that we have chosen not to be salt and light, and ask forgiveness for them, knowing the answer back is always ***"I love you, I forgive you, you are restored. Go and serve me in My love."***

That is an amazing message, isn't it? It comes from the heart of Christ that is filled with an amazing love, a love too good not to share. A love that encourages us to use what God has given us to be salt and light.

Conclusion

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

As those who have been called to faith and given the Holy Spirit this is Jesus' instructions to you and I. We didn't choose to be His followers, He chose us. We didn't choose to be salt and light to the world, He chose us to be that, and equipped us with the time, talents and treasures we need in order to do that. When we choose not to be, He calls us to repent and forgives us through His undeserved grace and mercy. Through that gift of love the Spirit encourages us to carry on in service to our Lord as living sacrifices. Through that love our Savior keeps changing us from salt lessness to saltiness, from dead flashlights to beams of light that shine out His love and His Gospel message. May that work continue in your life and mine, all the way to eternal life to come. Amen.