

February 5, 2023
Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Matthew 5:13-30 (1 Corinthians 2:1-12)

SALT AND LIGHT IN A DARKENED AND UNSAVORY WORLD.

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

Our text for meditation today comes from the Gospel according to St Matthew, the 5th chapter, which you heard read earlier.

As is often said, in real estate, the three most important things to consider are: location, location, location. However, when studying God’s Word, the three most important things are: context, context, context. And what is the context of our Gospel text this morning? Jesus is teaching believers. He is teaching His disciples, that is, all who have heard His call to repentance and have come to faith in Him. (cf: Matthew 4:17) And that includes you and me.

Last week we heard in the Beatitudes that Jesus has declared you and all believers *blessed* because in Christ you possess all the Gospel *blessings* that Jesus grants to all who are His disciples from this day until the Last Day when Christ returns in glory. Blessings such as the redemption in His blood, the forgiveness of sins, life, and eternal salvation – all according to the riches of His grace. (cf: Ephesians 1:7)

The context is – you dear disciple of Christ, now having been declared *blessed* and strengthened His Gospel message, Jesus now gives you and all believers your calling and identity as a disciple of Christ. He says:

“You are the salt of the earth...” (Matthew 5:13)

“You are the light of the world...” (Matthew 5:14)

Salt is for corruption and decay. It kills bacteria and preserves. Light casts out darkness. In Scripture the darkness is associated with evil, with danger, and with the condition of being lost and unable to find one’s way. It is no secret. Ever since the fall of Adam in the Garden, corruption, evil, and darkness abound. Just look around. Just when you think it cannot get any worse, something even deadlier or more perverse takes the country by storm. The unholy trinity of the world, the devil, the sinful flesh, continue to corrupt and decay the earth. The world is shrouded in the darkness of sin and death. Those walking in the darkness are lost and unable to find their way.

In our text, salt is metaphorical. Just as salt preserves food against corruption and decay, so too, by his or her Christian witness sharing the Word of God, the Word preserves the earth from

corruption and decay. The earth needs to be salted with the Word. People need to be called to repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. You are the salt of the earth. It is your calling and your identity.

Light is not *quite* as metaphorical. Jesus is the true Light which gives light to everyone. (cf: John 1:9) The Christian disciple is a reflection of Christ, shining light of His Word into the darkened and unbelieving world so that the world might become enlighten by the Gospel and know the redeeming love of Christ. The world needs to have the light of Christ shown into the darkness. Jesus says:

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12)

You are the light of the world. It, too, is your calling and your identity.

So, are you prepared to be salt and light? Are you up to the task? I imagine those disciples seated at the feet of their Lord did not think they were up to the task. Maybe you’re thinking, *“I’m merely a teaspoon of salt in an unsavory ocean of decay. I’m only one small candle shining in the midst of a huge black hole of darkness.”* Maybe you’re thinking, *“If I’m the salt the earth, then this earth’s going to be pretty rank and rotten. If I’m the light of the world, then this world’s going to remain in darkness.”*

Consider St Paul. He was only one man sent to preach to the Gentiles. In that day most orators and philosophers enjoyed showing off their rhetorical and debating skills. But not Paul. While he was educated and likely trained in rhetoric, he did not rely flowery phraseology or mysterious insight and knowledge to be salt and light to the Gentiles. He:

“... decided to know nothing among [the Corinthians] except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” (1 Corinthians 2:2)

That is all it takes. One person, proclaiming God’s Word – and the Word does all the work. God’s Word is living, creative, and active. (cf: Hebrews 4:12) It accomplishes exactly the purpose for which God sends it. (cf: Isaiah 55:11) God works in ways that the world finds foolish. While the people desire to hear from enlightened philosophers speaking with lofty speech and wisdom, the Holy Spirit works through God’s Word – spoken by ordinary people. Otherwise men’s faith would rest in the wisdom of men – not the power of God’s Word. (cf: 1 Corinthians 2:4-5)

All it takes is one person – and that one person is you. God has called you in baptismal waters to be His own. As Jesus’ disciple He sends you into the workplaces and the neighborhoods and wherever you find yourself – to be salt and light. You do not need fancy rhetoric or logic. All you need is the truth of God’s Word. The Gospel stands on its own.

“... it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...” (Romans 1:16)

Before you panic because you are afraid you have not been salty enough or because your light has not been shining brightly enough, I need to point out something. In our text, Jesus is not giving commands. He is making objective statements. He is not saying: *“You **should** be salt. You*

should be light.” No. He says: **“You are the salt of the earth...” “You are the light of the world...”**

Jesus is not trying to put you on a guilt trip or strike the fear of God in you. No. Your identity as a disciple of Christ is not created or preserved by how well you acknowledge and live out your identity as salt and light. Your identity is created and preserved by the Word of Jesus. It is not a mandate of what you are supposed to do – but it is a description of what you are. It is your present tense reality. It is what your Savior has worked in you and made you by His grace. You are that which salts the earth – and – you are that which gives light to the world.

To be sure, it is a difficult challenge to be who you are called to be as a disciple of Christ, to be salt and light. It is difficult to live as one redeemed by Christ the crucified in this corrupt and dismal world. It is much simpler to live as an animal who simply works and eats and sleeps. It seems a burden to live in the image of God rather than do what the world expects of you, gossiping about your neighbor, cheating on your taxes, whoring after the pleasures of the world, and putting your own needs before the needs of others.

It is a challenge because Satan is constantly tempting you to be something else, something less than you are, all the while making the less of this world look like more than it ever can be. But do not be fooled. You are more than all that. You are a child of God who has been made salty in the waters of Holy Baptism. At the font you received the Christ who is the light of the world and were illumined by the Holy Spirit.

In actuality, this is not a challenge for you at all. When Jesus calls you salt and light, He knows you cannot be salt and light on your own without Him. So if you are going to remain salt and light, Jesus must remain with you. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, He works in you and through you so that you are salt and light wherever you go. You are salt and light in your families whether you are a child, parent, grandparent, husband, wife, or any other way you are related to others.

You are salt and light in the work place as employers and employees. You’re salt and light in your community as friends and neighbors – as citizens of city, state, and nation. In all these roles Jesus has promised to be with you so that you are able to be salt of the earth and the light of the world.

When Christians interact with those living in darkness, with those living with no hope, the believer can be salt and light by assuring them that there is a loving God who has redeemed them through the death of Jesus on Calvary’s cross. They, too, can know the hope that is in Christ Jesus. They, too, can know that the Light has always been there for them and will never leave them nor forsake them. They, too, can know that there are no hoops to jump through or Laws that must be kept. Jesus has already taken care of all that. Jesus did not:

“... come to abolish the Law or the Prophets [but He came] to fulfill them”
(Matthew 5:17)

... because you and I cannot keep them ourselves. He put Himself under the Law:

“to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.” (Galatians 4:5)

Brothers and sisters in Christ you are the salt of the earth that preserves the earth from corruption and decay. You are the light of the world, reflecting the true light of Christ, shining light into the darkened and unbelieving world. You are salt and light so that by the work of the Holy Spirit your friends and acquaintances might be called to repentance and faith in Christ, that they have the joy of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, knowing they are free to live out their calling and identity as disciples of Christ, bearing fruits of faith, performing good works and deeds – not because they are required – but doing them out of love for God and neighbor.

Jesus has called you and has given you your identity as a disciple of Christ. You are salt and light. God’s powerful Word does all the work. God’s strong Word cleaved the darkness at creation. His strong Word cleaved the darkness when He took on human flesh at His incarnation. His strong Word cleaved the darkness in His own death and resurrection, shining the light of His salvation into a darkened world. His strong Word bespeaks you righteous for the sake of His own holiness. His strong Word proclaims the believer **“not guilty,”** just as if they have never sinned. His strong Word proclaims the power and wisdom of the cross, Jesus Christ and Him crucified so that you might have new life in Him, life everlasting.

You salt and light in this unsavory and darkened world. It is who you are in Christ Jesus. This is why it is important that you are here each week. It is here in the Divine Service that you hear the preached, strong Word of God. God’s strong Word restores you, strengthening your faith and forgiving your sins. It salts you and illumines you with the Holy Spirit. Just as salt kills bacteria and preserves food, being fed Jesus body and blood in His Supper forgives your sins and preserves you in body and soul unto life everlasting.

“... he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 1:6)

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.