

Matthew 5:13-20
"You are Salt and Light"
Epiphany 5A

February 8, 2026
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, West Salem, Wisc.
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Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Jesus said: "You are the salt of the earth. ... You are the light of the world"
(Matthew 5:13a, 14a).

Last week, Jesus described how blessed are those who have faith in Him. Today, Jesus continues the Sermon on the Mount as He declares that those who trust in Him are salt and light.

Salt is a preservative. Salt keeps food from spoiling. Salt is also used as a seasoning as it gives food more flavor. I, for one, like to always add salt to my fries, even before I even taste them. I am a fan of salt.

Now, what if you find yourself in a dark room. What do you do to bring light to that dark space? You could open the shades or curtains if there is daylight outside. You could flip a switch and let electricity light the room. You could light a candle. Or you could turn on a traditional flashlight or click the flashlight on your smartphone.

Although there are many ways to bring light to a dark room, there is only one way to pierce the darkness of sin and unbelief. This one way is Jesus. He is the Light of the world. Jesus alone is the Light that scatters the darkness of sin and unbelief. And it was the Holy Spirit who enlightened us to trust in Jesus.

When the disciples heard Jesus say to them, "***Follow Me***" (Matthew 4:19), they were changed. You see, Jesus called them with authority, as only God can. And so, they listened and followed Jesus. We, too, had this change as we were taken out of the fallen world of sin and darkness and were brought the Light of Christ through Holy Baptism. For as St. Paul says in Ephesians 5:8: "***For at one time you were in darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.***"

Now, light can also be painful. Maybe you have been awakened from a dead sleep by a bright light. Maybe you were awakened during REM and now you have that twitch. Being awakened by the light hurts. We say, "***Turn it off!***" That is how many reacted when they heard the Light of the World speak. You see, sin loves darkness. No wonder so many crimes happen at night and in the shadows.

Light casts out darkness. And darkness is associated with evil, with danger, with the condition of being lost and unable to find one's way.

The world we live in, well, it's in bad shape. It needs salt. It needs some preserving. It needs some flavor. The world is also a dark place. And there is a great need for light, so that people can see the truth and see what God is really like.

And Jesus today calls us salt and light.

He says, ***"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. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 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"*** (Matthew 5:13-15).

Jesus says, *"You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world."* So, what do you think about that? How do you respond to that proclamation? What are we to do? Well, we are to believe it.

But what happens if you don't believe that you are salt and light? Well, that's not the brightest idea, because what Jesus says is, well, always true. But if you don't believe it, then, Jesus gives us the answer to that. He says, if you don't believe that, then you will be ***"thrown out and trampled under people's feet"*** (Matthew 5:13b). That doesn't sound like too much fun.

So, what are we to do? We should believe Jesus, because this is what Jesus says we are.

You see, our identity is created and preserved by the very Word of Jesus, who has also declared everyone in Christ to be blessed.

Now, we should not narrow the meaning of "salt" too precisely, because we can get caught up on what it means to be salty. "Salt" is parallel with "light," and it is true that salt served many useful functions in the ancient world. And it is clear that the earth is evil, corrupt, and deficient. The earth needs to be salted: people need to be called to repent and believe the Good News that in Jesus ***"the kingdom of heaven is at hand"*** (Matthew 4:17).

For, if Christ's disciples – *you and me* – would become tasteless – *by living unrepentant lives*, then how would the earth be salted?

Jesus calls us salt and light. As salt and light, Jesus is giving us our vocation. He is declaring who we are in Christ.

You see, followers of Jesus do not just *believe* differently than unbelievers; we *live* differently. The truth is, if we can't be easily distinguished from the unbelieving world, it's either because they are becoming like us – *which would be a great thing* – or most likely, we are behaving like them – *a very bad thing*. If that's the case, there's as much wrong with us as with the unbelieving world.

To this, Jesus says, ***“Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven”*** (Matthew 5:16).

Shades in windows are good for privacy, but don't draw down the shades of your faith as you live through life. And a covered lamp is a waste of light – *and a pretty stupid way to waste that light* – and so is concealed faith.

We can't hide our faith. We must live out our faith. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, St. James writes: ***“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead”*** (James 2:14-17).

It is one thing to say you have faith. It's another thing to live out that faith.

Now, what is expected when you flip a light switch? You expect Electricity to give power to the light and for the light to shine. Likewise, that Word that brought the light of faith to you and me is also the Word that enables us to bring that light of Christ to the world.

Again, Jesus declares that you and I are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. This is our blessing in Christ and our responsibility in Christ. Again, following Jesus is not just for our personal benefit, but for the benefit of our neighbor. Being salt and light, Jesus calls us to be the hope in this dark world.

So, Jesus calls us to do good works that are public and visible and done with one purpose in mind: that others may glorify the heavenly Father. And to glorify the heavenly Father, one must know Him rightly. And one can only know the heavenly Father rightly through the right knowledge of His only-begotten Son.

These good works are done in ordinary ways as we live out our daily vocations. But in these ordinary ways, Jesus calls us to be extraordinary as we are called to live lives of remarkable purity, faithfulness, piety, love, and generosity. So, we don't live lives in the same ways that non-Christians do. We are called by Jesus to be extraordinary husbands and wives, remarkable neighbors and employees, powerful friends and citizens. So, how is this seen in action? Some may say going on a mission trip is a good work. But so is shoveling your neighbor's sidewalk, or having devotions with them, or inviting them to church, or holding your temper, or not lying, or by confessing your sins and asking for forgiveness, instead of blaming others or finding excuses for your actions. You see, through our words and deeds, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we will be like salt and light in this darkness.

Again, both words and deeds are necessary. Words without deeds will not be heard. Deeds without words will bring no one to praise the Father in heaven.

Christ's apostles were often dim in reflecting the Light of Christ, and so are we. Thanks be to God that He is patient and does not so quickly discard us when we fail. While we were still stuck in the mire of sin, God showed His love for us as He sent His Son Jesus to live our life and to suffer the death we all deserve because of our sins. On Good Friday, His lifeless body was laid in a cold, dark tomb. But in the bright light of Easter, Jesus threw open the door of the grave and death! He opened salvation to all who would believe in Him.

So, when we fail to be salt and light, the Holy Spirit leads us to repent as we renounce the ways of sin and darkness, as we are forgiven for the sake of Jesus' cross, and we strive anew as we follow Him.

When we love as Christ loves, people will take notice. And that may lead others to see the Light of Christ, the light of hope in this dark world. And we can do nothing apart from Jesus, who declares us salt and light. So, listen to Jesus. All of God's blessings belong to you. You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. Amen.

*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.*

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +