**2/5/23**

**Salt, Light, Good Works**

**Matthew 5:13-20**

Every day I wake up and put my feet on the floor I am hopeful to be able to just be a little more like Jesus by following his example. I am hopeful to be able to make people better by empowering them and teaching them skills and ways to handle things that does not let them feel constantly defeated or lost in the big world we live in each and every day. I am more so hopeful to be able to show people that through my very own faith and conviction that there is always victory despite how grim a situation can appear over a short or long period of time.

With all of that being said, I realize it is also my responsibility to do the work as his hands and feet, and let the outcome be handled by God. I at no point can think that I am the one that will be the ultimate difference maker or judge. I am reminded that I am one of his many servants, and I can indeed help grow the kingdom with his help. However, I also realize, like any job, I cannot do it without certain tools. I also need to follow certain directions, or for this purpose, laws set in place oh so many years ago. I am privileged enough to follow the path that those have already created in front of me. As I put my necklace on each and every day and kiss it I remember that Philippians 4:13 tells me that “I can do all things through Christ who is my strength.”

Does that sum up our Gospel Reading pretty well for you today? Well, I hope so. I mean after all I was really trying to figure out what or how to share with you between a busy work and church week, driving to and from Lancaster yesterday to spend time with family, and dealing with some situations at times that I really felt a certain kind of way about. So, since I summed things up that easily, and since I had a pretty busy and stressful week, I am pretty confident that I can say we are done here, and we can move on with our worship service. Not even two pages, I know you are all rejoicing. So, grab your hymnals and open to…. Alright, not so fast! It would not be fair to you or me to cut things that short. So, there is more for sure. So, I am going to ask you to hang onto your pews or seats a little tighter for a few more minutes as I take you on the ride that my research provided me with over the past few days.

I want to remind you that each time we gather together in these very pews, and on the conference call, as a congregation it is very easy for us to pretend as if our Sunday church selves are different. However, I am here to inform you that that particular thought process could not be any further from the truth! We are not disconnected at all from our Monday through Saturday work, volunteer, social, and fun selves. We are the same exact persons when we come in those church doors, physically or virtually. We are the same exact persons as compared to when we punch the time clock and report for work, go out and volunteer and connect with others in ministry in the community, spend time with our family and friends anywhere and everywhere we can imagine or travel to, or simply do whatever while having some fun. Each aspect of our very lives informs and enlightens the other. Acting right and following the Commandments by using those tools of salt and light from our Gospel Reading today is the very key to Christian living.

 After all, ““You are the salt of the earth… You are the light of the world” as we read in Matthew 5:13-14. “Notice that Jesus’ statements are descriptive; he articulates what the people gathered already are, not what they might be (or could be or should be, if only they did “x”). Jesus tells us what we are before getting into the expectations.” (1) Talk about an empowerment tool! Our maker really knew that he needed to get our minds right before we headed out on the journey. He knew he needed to build us up before putting us out in the fields to work. As a Christ follower the expectations are many for sure, but we are blessed through grace to be able to serve and act so we can inform and bless others. So, are you still sitting there and wondering what the heck all of this really means?

Now, if you are indeed wondering, then let me inform you of these simple keys aspects. “A salt rich life is one defined by enriching others. To let one’s light shine is to continually seek deliverance for the oppressed.” (1) And we do so when we “Let the light of our good works shine before others.” (1) I think I talked about that a bit earlier right? Well, no better time than the present to reiterate that.

Let’s us also go over these key concepts again. “A Christian should be just as much a Christian in the workplace, the classroom, the health center, the kitchen, and on the bus, as they are in church. After all, Jesus did not say, “You are the light of the Church.” He said, “You are the light of the world.” And as we take part in life in our society, our Christian faith should be evident to all.” (3) “A faith whose effects stop at the church door is not much use to anyone.” (3) after all… is it?

We always have to put things back into context a little bit. We get the opportunity to remind ourselves that “Our purpose is not to live it up until we're laid down in the ground and slide into the afterlife. Our purpose is not to pile up points hoping God might let us into heaven. No, our purpose as Christians is to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.” (4)

We are often reminded that “The world does not like our testimony, for salt has a bite. But we dare not blend in, compromising the testimony of Jesus. When salt blends in, it's no longer salty. Then, what's it good for? It would have been better if we had never been a Christian. If you are not salt, you are not a Christian. If you are a Christian, you are salt.” (4) Furthermore, “As you let your light shine, think especially of doing those things which will lead others to praise your Father in heaven who gave his Son as the Savior for the world.” (4)

Lastly, but not least, we are called in today’s Gospel Reading to remember that “Jesus does correct the false interpretations of God's law taught by many of the religious leaders of his time, but he wasn't at all abolishing the law. He isn't adding to it either. His mission was not to change old rules or make new ones.” (4) The law is there to keep us in check, and hold us accountable to the larger purpose.

Now, if you happened to notice, I recently put up a statement on our bulletin board between the church offices. You may have wondered where I came up with that, and you may think we do not use that word “priest” in the Lutheran church. Well, I am here to inform you that I did not come up with that statement at all, and I am not the one using a so-called taboo word in our church building. Let me educate you a bit, that is if you are already not aware that “Martin Luther spoke of the "priesthood of all believers": a theological concept that points to the fact that ministry is not just the work of the pastor. Luther reminded the laity (non-clergy) to be "little Christs" to each other. According to Luther, God’s people are to pray for each other. "They are to listen to their sisters’ and brothers’ confessions of sin and cries of distress. They are to speak God’s cheering word of forgiveness and consolation. They are to be agents of God’s overflowing goodness by ministering to the poor and oppressed" (from the Ministry in Daily Life section of www.elca.org/dm). Though pastors are called to the ministry of word and sacrament, they are not alone in their calling to minister to the world around them.” (2)

“Clergy work mostly with church people talking about church events. It would be difficult for clergy to single-handedly carry out the church’s mission to be servants in and for the world. At best, clergy can equip church members to live out their own faith in daily life, so that they can be "little Christs" to those they work and live with.” (2)

“Laypeople are more engaged on a daily basis "outside" the walls of the church. They work there; they play there; they get to know non-church members through regular contact. The laity are a "natural bridge by which a movement moves from the sanctuary to the street" (from the Ministry in Daily Life section of www.elca.org/dm).” (2)

This is exactly where I get to experience both worlds. I get to be up here and share the Word with you on Sundays, and listen to and empower you throughout the week in Bible Study or other discussions. I also get to do the so-called dirty work out in the streets. I get to talk to others and serve them in my job in the mental health field. I can do my best to build them up and preserve them with that tool of salt, and I get to shine the light of Christ while doing the work that we are all called to do.

I get the rich experience and ability of being able to fill both roles at this time while I continue to learn and grow and follow the calling that Christ has put on my life. I think that is pretty cool, but at times I know it can be very heavy or overwhelming. And that is exactly where I call on him, and more importantly that is also where I call on each and every one of you for strength and perseverance. So, let us all remind ourselves that we are equipped with salt, light, and we can follow the laws in a continued effort to fulfill our role as the Priesthood of all Believers.

Amen.

**References**

(1) SundaysandSeasons.com

 Sunday, February 5, 2023

 Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

 Lectionary 5, Year A

(2) SermonCentral.com

 Ministry In Daily Life

 Contributed by Carla Powell on Feb 2, 2002

 Scripture: Matthew 5:13-20

 Denomination: Lutheran

(3) SermonCentral.com

 Salt And Light

 Contributed by Hans Krause on Oct 19, 2018

 Scripture: Jeremiah 17:5-8, Matthew 5:13-16

 Denomination: Lutheran

(4) SermonCentral.com

 Why Am I A Christian? Series

 Contributed by Gregg Bitter on Mar 7, 2011

 Scripture: Matthew 5:13-20

 Denomination: Lutheran

**Matthew 5:13-20**

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus encourages his followers to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, doing good works and keeping God’s commandments.

[Jesus said:] 13“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

 14“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. 15No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

 17“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. 18For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. 19Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”