



Pastor Gwen's Message
5th Sunday after Epiphany
"Salt and Light"
Sunday February 5, 2023

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

Rev. Strayhorn told this story: There was a father teaching his son what a Christian should be like. He talked about being the salt of the earth and the light of the world and a few other teachings. When the lesson was over, the father realized he had his work cut out for himself because the little boy asked, "Daddy, have I ever met one of these Christians?"

In our Gospel reading today, we are challenged by Jesus with two very vivid images of what it means to be a Christian. Jesus in this section of the Sermon on the Mount, uses SALT and LIGHT to confer what it is to be, one of his followers. So, let's look at these two ideas for a few minutes this morning.

First salt. Don't think I have to do very much of an intro on what salt is and what salt does. We all know that we use salt every day to season our food. It is used as a preservative and is also an important mineral that is necessary for our lives. Years ago, salt was also used for its medicinal qualities and as an exchange medium. And in the Northwoods we use it to take care of ice on our streets and walkways. However, none of that is true if the salt sits on your kitchen table in the salt-shaker and is never used. And if salt is not used it loses its taste and becomes worthless. Sounds like Jesus knew what a fitting metaphor for the people of God, salt was.

Jesus calls us the salt of the earth. He does not say we might someday be, or we will become, but rather we ARE the salt of the earth. By God's grace the miracle has already happened, that we are the salt of the earth.

We have a responsibility to transform those around us just as salt transforms food when used as seasoning or as a preservative. And those of us who watch our salt intake find that a little goes a long way in making our food taste better. This is true of us as well. We are called to be the "salt of the earth" and flavor life through the living out of our faith. We can also preserve the Bible's standards of morality. We can also be curative. We can share with

the world a message of hope and forgiveness from a Savior that can bring healing to all of the hurts in the world.

There was a group of young people discussing this very text one day. "You are the salt of the earth". They came up with the same answers that we have just touched on. "Salt enhances flavor. Salt preserves from decay. Salt helps heal." One of the Christian girls said, "Salt creates thirst." The room was suddenly very quiet as everyone was thinking of what to say. I suspect you are thinking too, "Have I ever made anyone thirsty for Jesus?"

A few of us can make a big difference in the world. We can season the world with God's love and grace. Just take our women's ministry of making quilts and kits. As our women gather on Tuesday in our Fellowship Hall and it may appear to some that they are doing menial work, but folks that is not true. It is important work that can and does make a difference in the lives of those that receive these gifts. We may not know all the stories of the recipients, but there are many stories written by Lutheran World Relief that tell of those that have been blessed by the work our women continue to do.

Jesus warns us that we should not lose our saltiness and become complacent. We then would be worthless in the kingdom of God. The danger of this happening comes from being tempted by the values of the world around us. When we are influenced by the world rather than the living breathing word of God, we can lose our way, our saltiness. So, beware!

Our second topic this morning is Light. Jesus again says that we ARE the light of the world. This positive affirmation for us gives another idea of how to look at our relationship with God. In confirmation on Wednesday Margaret and I were trying to get across to the students the difference between saints and sinners. To do that I talked about light and darkness. Many folks are fearful of the dark, yet darkness can cover a multitude of sins. The light on the other hand exposes the true nature of things. Light can reveal all, even things we don't want to see or admit about ourselves.

I know that you have all at one time or another experienced the power going out in your homes. All of a sudden you are plunged into darkness. You creep around feeling for a flashlight so you can light a candle or two, because we all know that danger can lurk in the darkness.

I told the kids that one night when I was having dinner with the Milwaukee County Sherriff, he made a proclamation that I have never forgotten. He said, "Nothing good ever happens after midnight". Darkness can embolden people to do bad things because they think no one will see.

I do think that light does expose where the dangers are, but it also reveals where safety and new life are found. As I was reading this week, I read that the "Light of Christ exposes our need for salvation." A good thought to think on this week.

Even though Jesus calls us the light of the world, like everything in creation, light has to come from somewhere. I think that he meant here that we are to be reflectors of the light

of God. God is the illuminating source for all life. God provides the light into our dark world.

In order to be a reflector of the light, you first have to capture the light. And you can receive that by reading God's word and asking the Holy Spirit to enlighten you with ever verse. You can pray to God for guidance on how to reflect his love and certainly by following the example of His Son, Jesus. And then give some thought to how to reflect the light of God.

Do any of you use reflectors in your driveway in the winter so the snowplow driver knows where to plow? We use blue ones and I sure love them, so I make sure I hit the driveway approach. Last year, they were turned the wrong way so that my headlights did not reflect on them and shine. Try moving them even a ¼ turn in the middle of winter's frozen ground. We too need to give some thought as to where we will show God's love. Light does not bend around corners. And, it is impossible to shine your light simultaneously in all directions. So, concentrate on where to shine God's love so it will do the most good. I often find myself contemplating the woes of the world. I have come to realize that I cannot solve problems on that huge of a scale. I am left with shining God's light in and around me. And wouldn't that be nice if everyone would do that and then all the world would be covered by God's amazing loving light. Remember as a kid taking a magnifying glass and using the sun to try to start a dried leaf on fire. And so, it goes with God's love. Concentrate on what you can shed light on and focus on sharing His love close to home.

Once upon a time, and more often than that, I hope, there were three college students discussing various versions of the Bible. One said, "I really like the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. It is easier to read than the older versions". A second student said, "I like the Jerusalem Bible. It is easy to read, and it is poetic in its style. I can use it in my daily prayer." The third student surprised them all and said, "I like my mother's version the best. She translated the Bible into action I can use in my daily life."

That is what we are called to do folks. We are all called to be the salt and the light translating the Word of God into action. By doing that others will see and taste how much God loves us. So go out and be salt and be the light of God in Christ Jesus. **AMEN**