

## The Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

### Text: Matthew 5:13-16 (NIV)

<sup>13</sup>“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. <sup>14</sup>“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup>Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. <sup>16</sup>In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

### *Theme: We Are the Salt and Light of the World*

Salt and light are two of the most important things in the world. Both of them are important for life. When the New Testament was written, there was no refrigeration, so meat was preserved with salt. Light is what makes things grow. Without it, there could be no life at all.

In these verses Jesus calls Christians the “Salt of the earth” and the “light of the world.” He has just said that those who “are poor in spirit,” “mourn,” “are meek,” “hunger and thirst for righteousness,” “are merciful,” “are pure in heart,” “are peacemakers,” and are persecuted for His name’s sake,” are blessed. Now Jesus says that these blessed people are what the world needs. We are the salt and light of the world.

#### I. We are salt and light for a world that is perishing in sin.

You might say that this world is rotting and that it is lost in the darkness of sin. Jesus said in John 3, “*Men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.*” Proverbs 2 says much the same thing, “*[Men] walk in dark ways, delight in doing wrong and rejoice in the perverseness of evil. Their paths are crooked and they are devious in their ways.*” (Prov 2:13-15) Our world loves sin. It mocks our Lord’s commandments and even hates them. Sin makes us feel good for the moment. The biggest concern for those who walk in darkness is that their personal pleasure at this moment. You don’t have to look far to see how far our world today is running from our Lord’s Commandments.

But we see how that is destroying our world today. Sin ends us destroying our own lives, and it hurts other people. There are severe consequences to our sin. It leads to people taking advantage of each other, breaking promises, and doing anything to get what they want. In a dog eat dog world, no one survives. In the end everyone gets eaten by someone else. When justice and mercy are lacking in a society, it begins to stink like a piece of rotting meat. Everyone wanders around as if we are in the dark. It is a horrible place to be when selfishness and foolish pride are more prominent than justice and mercy.

Jesus says, “Not so with you.” We are called to take the 10 Commandments to heart. There are some commandments that we would rather not hear. They point out our sins clearly, just as when the light shines in the darkness, but as Christians we repent of those sins. We try to stay clear of those temptations. We want to flee temptation and repent of our sins. That is a big struggle for us as Christians today. We sometimes want God’s love and blessings, but we want them on our terms. We

don't want anyone, even God, to express concern about our behavior. But Jesus says that salt that loses is "saltiness" is good for nothing, and no one would ever place a basket over a lamp. There are things, which the world engages in, which we as Christians must say "no" to. We are called to leave immorality behind and live lives that are full of kindness, compassion, and forgiveness.

We want to follow the example of our Savior. Jesus was kind and merciful to all who were in need. The early church followed His example and shared freely with each other. Paul calls on us to bear each others burdens in Galatians 6. Even the Romans began to remark how these Christians loved each other. Because of that, there were many people who became Christians through those Christian works of charity. We might think of the hospitals, orphanages, nursing homes, ministries such as Bethesda or A Place of Refuge, schools, and universities, which have all been started by the church. When we follow our Savior's example and do good works, it gives God glory. Still today people take notice of our works as Christians. There should be a noticeable difference in the way that the world lives and the way that we live as God's people. Our lives should be marked with justice, faithfulness, and mercy.

## II. We are salt and light for a world that is perishing in hopelessness.

This world is lost. Where there is no faith in Christ, society itself begins to crumble. Along with all of the violence, there is also hopelessness. We live in a very hopeless world today. We have so many things, but they can't give us hope or peace. It feels good when we buy things, but that satisfaction is only temporary, and it sometimes hurts even more when the bills come. There are many young people today who see no hope for their future. There are older people who have so many things, but they can no longer enjoy them because their health is failing. It all seems very hopeless. To be honest, life is hopeless without Christ. In the end we die and have no hope at all.

But Jesus came into this world, so that we will not perish. That is expressed so well in John 3:16, *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in Him shall not **perish**, but have everlasting life."* Jesus calls Himself the "Light of the World." in John 8:12. Our light as Christians is simply a reflection of Jesus. His light shines through us in this dark world. To a world that is perishing, He brings new life. He does it through the forgiveness of sins. He paid for them all in full on the cross. We confess our sins, and He takes them all away. He clothes us with His pure righteousness. Not a spot of sin remains. He is also near with His blessing and deliverance. Even in the darkest days of our lives, we have nothing to fear, because we know that the One who blesses us is always near. He is even able to work the worst situations in our lives for good. He fills our hearts with hope and the peace that passes all understanding when we trust that all things are in His hands, and He works everything for our good. But His greatest gift is eternal life. We know that the best is yet to come. The greatest riches that we have in this life cannot compare with what Christ will give to us in the resurrection of the dead. There will be no more mourning or crying or pain. All things will be good for all of eternity. We will live and reign with our God forever.

We are the beacons that point others to that good news of Christ. Whom do you know that is struggling with guilt over horrible things that they have done? We have the good new of the forgiveness of sins in Christ. Whom do you know who is struggling with the cares and worries of this life? Maybe God has given you the means to help them in their need, but He has also given you

words of hope as you can remind them that God will never leave them or forsake them. Whom do you know who is mourning or even dreading their last hour on this earth? We have the good news that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. God can use our simple message of Christ to bring hope and peace to people who feel as though they are perishing or that they are lost in the dark.

In these verses Jesus is telling us that we are different from the rest of the world. They are perishing and lost in the dark. We have new life in Christ, and we know where we are going as we follow Him. May God's Spirit give us the strength that we will not fall into the sinful ways of the world, but that our faith in Christ is strong and that it shows itself both in our confession and our deeds. It is that faith in Christ that saves us and points this world to the love of Him who can save them too. In His name,

Amen.

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