

Fifth Sunday After Epiphany – February 9, 2014
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Matthew 5:13-18 (NIV)

"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 underfoot. 14) "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 15) 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. 16) In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. 17) "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18) For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus;

I'm sure I don't have to try to hard to convince Anna & Eric that their little boy is a blessing. They would be the first to say "I agree" to the psalmist who wrote "Children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring a reward from him." [Psalm 127:3 NIV] Today God has showered his blessings on this child – washing away his sins and making him a member of his family through Baptism. By calling him to faith the Lord made him a blessing not only to his parents but to others as well.

That's one of the lessons that Jesus wants us to take home from his Sermon on the Mount. Jesus began his sermon with several statements describing those who have been called to faith in him. He described Christians as people who are poor in spirit, who mourn, who are meek, who hunger and thirst after righteousness, who are merciful, pure in heart, are peace makers and who are persecuted for his sake. And he called them blessed. Dear Christian friends, your Lord and Savior has called you blessed and he has encouraged you to stand firm in the faith with his promises.

And now our Savior continues speaking to Christians to remind them that he has called them to faith not just to bless them but so that they can also be a blessing to others. You are blessed – that was the focus of our sermon last week. To the focus is slightly different:

Theme: You are a Blessing

1. Because Christ has fulfilled the Law and the Prophets
- 2 So you can be the salt of the earth and the light of the world

I'd like to explain why it is that Christians are a blessing. And in order to do that I'm going to jump over the opening words of our text for today to these words: **17) "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.**

Jesus came to do what we could never do. He came to live a perfect life for us. Jesus himself explained that this is exactly what we needed when he said: **For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.**

Think of the most religious person that you can imagine. Maybe it's a family member who goes to church faithfully each week. Maybe it's someone from the past like Mother Theresa who spent a life time helping the poor. It doesn't matter who it is they are unqualified to enter the kingdom of heaven on the basis of what they have done. The Bible is clear about that. The psalmist said it first: **Everyone has turned away, all have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.** (Psalm 53:3, cf also Psalm 14:3)

The apostle Paul explains what this means for us: **Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin. 21) But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22) This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, 23) for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24) and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.** [Romans 3:20-24 NIV]

Paul points us away from our own efforts and to the efforts of Jesus who came to fulfill the Law for us. The Law and the Prophets pointed to Jesus. There may have been those who thought that Jesus was going to promote a new teaching; that he would offer some new laws which people could actually keep for themselves. Jesus tramples on those ideas when he says, **Don't think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets.** Whatever was written in the Law of Moses and the books of the Prophets in the Old Testament Scriptures would not be set aside by Jesus. Instead he would fulfill the Law by loving God perfectly and by loving everyone in this world so much that would lay down his perfect life as the sacrifice for their sins so that might be blessed with his perfection and so enter into the kingdom of heaven.

It is because of what Jesus did that you are blessed, dear Christian. And, dear Christian, it is because of what Jesus has done that you are also a blessing. You are a Blessing

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Speaking to his disciples Jesus said: "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 underfoot.

14) You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 15) 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. 16) In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

You – all of you – who have been blessed by Jesus are the salt of the earth. Before we consider what Jesus has said it's important for us to consider what he didn't say. He didn't say you might be or you could be or you should be the salt of the earth. He said you are the salt of the earth. Now just what does this mean?

Think for a moment about the uses for salt. Now according to the Salt Institute there are over 14,000 uses for salt! Not only is salt plentiful but is it also versatile. You can find all kinds of uses for it on the internet. Interestingly the very first web site that I looked at after searching for uses of salt contained this statement: **For thousands of years, salt (sodium chloride) has been used to preserve food and for cleaning...**

So let's start there. Christians are the preservative of the world. The Lord promised Abraham that he would preserve or spare the city of Sodom if there had been only 10 righteous people there – but alas there were not even ten Christians in the entire city. Now he preserves this world so that Christians may serve him here as they make disciples of all nations.

If we think of salt in terms of preventing decay or cleansing we will have in mind the thoughts that Jesus had in mind in this sermon. Christians prevent decay in this world and promote cleansing when we use the Law to convict of sin. Just as salt rubbed on wound might cause that wound to sting so it stings when the Law is used to point out sin and error. But once the cleansing has taken place the healing can begin. And so once the Law has convicted a person of sin then the Gospel can sooth the wounded with its healing powers. By sharing

the Gospel we can preserve others from eternal destruction. That's the most wonderful blessing that we could ever offer to a person.

Just as Jesus said to Christians; you are the salt of the earth he also has told us that Christians will be his witnesses. It is the very nature of a Christian to speak and live for his Savior. Or as Jesus says in our text to let our lights shine.

We have been rescued by Jesus so that we can lead others to him in the same way that a beacon in the harbor leads a ship to safety. Listen again to what Jesus says to Christians: **"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 15) 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. 16) In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.**

It is the nature of light to shine. There's no such thing as light that doesn't shine. That would be like cold heat or dry water. Of course it is possible to cover up a light so that no one can see it but under normal circumstances that wouldn't serve any practical purpose.

Jesus came into the world as the light of the world. He came to chase away the darkness of sin and unbelief by calling us to believe in the truth and to follow him. He calls us to walk in the light of his truth and to shun the darkness of sin and unbelief.

It's really an amazing to hear Jesus call us the light of the world when we consider that he himself is called the light of the world. By calling us the light Jesus wants us to understand that we are truly pure and holy in God's sight because of his righteousness. In the same way that the moon reflects the light of the sun so Christians reflect the light of the Son of God as we live lives which reflect his will.

Let the world see what I have done for you – let your light shine before others. Don't hide it under a bowl or a bushel. Don't be afraid to live as children of the light reflecting your joy and love for Christ and his ways. Love others as he has loved you. Let the people of this world see your good deeds so that they might join you in giving glory to your Father in heaven.

Dear Christian friends, the world notices our actions as Christians. It notices when Christians try to blend in and enjoy the popularity of the world rather than setting themselves apart from the sinful ways and attitudes of this world. When we do that we are bring shame and dishonor to our heavenly Father. It also notices when we don't go along with the world. It notices when we put our hope on display and sometimes people may even ask us why it is that we are different. That's why Peter urged us to **always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks us to give the reason for our hope.** (cf. 1 Peter 3:15)

It is then that we can let the light of Christ shine and it is then that we can use the purifying and preserving nature of the Law and the Gospel to share with them the hope of everlasting life which Jesus made possible for them by fulfilling the Law and the Prophets for them. What a blessing it will be them to learn of Jesus and his blessings for them.

Dear Christian friends you have been blessed by God and you are a blessing. You are a Blessing

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May God's blessings rest on you as you let his light shine in the world so that others may be blessed through you! Amen.