

Text: Matthew 5:13-16 Fifth Sunday after Epiphany. **February 16, 2014.**

Jesus Christ is the light of the world. The light no darkness can overcome. Amen.

You can learn the most from the simplest things. Take the “children’s” song, *This little Gospel light of mine*. Simple words. Profound truth. It’s not really just for children. I’m gonna let it shine. All around the neighborhood, I’m gonna let it shine. Won’t let Satan poof it out. I’m gonna let it shine. Let it shine. Let it shine. All the time. Let it shine. That song is taken from the Bible. I’m gonna let it shine it what God wants you to do, no matter how old or young you are. I’m gonna let it shine is part of the best sermon ever. I’m gonna let it shine.

Before we get to that picture, “You are the light of the world,” Jesus gives us another thought to ponder. “You are the salt of the earth.” What does that mean? I didn’t get this verse. How can salt lose its saltiness? Well, in those times, the salt was not the highest quality. It was often taken from the Dead Sea or the Salt Sea and the sodium could leech out, making it no longer salty. You couldn’t use it for salt anymore. But you couldn’t throw it away just anywhere, the sodium residue would kill plants. In fact, at times they would sprinkle old salt on the fields of defeated nations to prevent them from growing crops. All you could do with salt that lost its saltiness was throw it in the streets for people to trample down.

But why use salt? Today salt is kind of a nuisance. It gets on your car and makes it rusty. It gets on your clothes in the winter and turns your black pants dirty. We are constantly hearing, “Quit eating so much salt!” But then, it was different. Salt was a precious preservative. Without refrigeration or freezers, salt was the only way to preserve meat. Salt kept the meat from going bad.

In the same way, you, you, a person, are a preservative on this earth. Your Christian faith is preserving, saving, a world from the wrath of God’s destruction. I know we often lament how unchristian the world seems to be. And in many ways, that’s accurate. But think of the precious preservative you are in this world, as Christians. Once in the Bible God was going to destroy two entire cities for their unbelief and wicked behavior. God promised, “If I can find ten righteous people there, I will not destroy the city.” Just ten! We have more than ten people here. Maybe you are the ones preserving the entire city! How precious are Christians in God’s sight, the salt of the earth.

How valuable salt is. At that time, salt had a high value. A salary was money to buy salt. Salt was a valuable commodity to be traded and sold at high prices. So are you. You are valuable to God, so valuable, he paid the price of his only Son, the precious blood of Jesus, for you. Value is determined by what someone is willing to pay. Back then, people were willing to pay a high price for salt. God was willing to pay a high price for you.

So, to summarize, salt was a precious preservative, a valuable commodity. Salt also was used for flavoring foods, as it is today. That’s your job as well, to bring a Christian flavor to the earth. A little salt can go a long way in flavoring a big pot of stew. So a little Christian flavor can go a long way.

But how easy it is to stay in the shaker, with the rest of the salt and not be a precious preservative, a valuable commodity, a Christian flavoring. If people find out I’m a Christian, they won’t want to talk to me at work. If I put up a cross, I’ll have to take sensitivity training. True story. If I befriend the weird kid at school, I won’t be cool and being cool is the most valuable commodity.

Here’s another thing about salt. It stings when you put it on a wound, but it ultimately heals. Jesus is that salt. His Word stings when we realize how unsalty we have been. Let’s put it another way, how sinful we have been. Actually the word for losing saltiness means foolish. How foolish to not flavor, not preserve, not be valuable. Yet that’s what we do.

But that same salt that stings, heals. God’s Word brings healing to our sinful hearts. Jesus put his perfect life of perfect salt in place of your imperfect life of sin. Jesus put his perfect life on the cross to show how valuable you are to God. You are worth the price of God’s own Son. God has baptized you to show what a precious commodity you are to him. You are his child. There’s nothing more precious in life than that.

You know, salt usually works silently, unseen. But not light. Light is out in the open. Light is made to shine. Light is made to be visible, for all to see. You are not just the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. And I’m gonna let it shine.

Jesus uses a couple of pictures for light. One is a city on a hill. I've seen the city Jesus was likely referring to. It sits atop a high hill. Really stands out. Try to imagine a world without city lights, a time when dark was bedtime because you didn't have lights. Maybe you've been camping and can picture the darkness, or out on a boat with only one small green light on the river to guide you. Now you can picture a little better a city on a hill. It stands out. You can't miss it.

Same with a light in the house. At this time, most houses were one room, so you only needed one lamp. You had one lampstand and from that one lampstand one lamp could give light to everyone in the house. Who would be so foolish as to put that light under a bushel basket? This was the only light you had in the whole house!

You are the light of the world. Jesus referred to himself in exactly the same way, the light of the world. You have the privilege to be Jesus to the world. No one can visibly see Jesus. But people can visibly see you. When people look at you, they ought to see a little bit of Jesus.

Wow! That's a lot to live up to, a little bit of Jesus. I don't know if I'm up for it. Jesus makes you up for it. Jesus shined his light on your heart so your light can shine to the hearts of others. What is Jesus like? That's what you are to be like! What is Jesus like? Loving, kind, compassionate, forgiving, selfless. That's what you are to be. That's what light is.

And light does that in a visible way. Light is loving in the open, kind for all to see, forgiving, even those who don't deserve it, selfless in a noticeable way. Light stands out. Here's something else cool. Light breaks darkness. When light meets darkness, light always wins. That's part of your privilege as the light of the world, to break the darkness. Darkness stands for unbelief, sin, hiding evil deeds. You don't have to hide your evil deeds. You can let your good works show.

Do those good works before others, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. Notice a couple more things about light. Light doesn't so much draw attention to itself, as much as light draws attention to what it illuminates. Your light illuminates Jesus. Your good deeds shine a bright light on Jesus. Jesus pulled you out of darkness. Jesus brought you the light of faith. Jesus gave you the power to do good works. So when you do good works for others to see, you don't have to be showing off. You are shining a light on Jesus. You don't want people to say, "What a nice person you are!" You ultimately want people to say, "What a great God you have!" Direct the attention to Jesus. You can pray in a restaurant. It's not showing off if you are doing it to draw attention to Jesus. If you are doing it to draw attention to yourself, then Jesus has something else to say. Being a light directs attention to God, so I'm gonna let it shine.

I'm gonna let it shine because light is beneficial. As we start to see more sunlight, moods improve. If it's cold and sunny, it's not so bad. The light you shine on Jesus will benefit others. Maybe not everyone will appreciate it right away, but it will get noticed.

How can I let my light shine then? What can I do so that I'm gonna let it shine? Man, there are so many ways. Let's talk about just a few. Do you know one neighbor who doesn't know the light of Jesus? Maybe a better question would be, "Do you know one of your neighbors?" Can you help them shovel snow? Can you chat with a purpose to show them the light? Maybe they mention a family illness. Those are tough. Can you go a little deeper than, "I'm sure everything will be ok"? Maybe you can let a little more light shine with something like, "When my mom was sick we prayed for her every day. And now she's in heaven. We'll get to see her again, where everything is ok." Is there one coworker out with the flu? Can you point out, "God works all things together for good to those who love him"? Share how God brought you through a sickness. Share what good has come out of it. Let them see Jesus in you. Maybe it's something as simple as your answer to the greeting, "How are you doing?" Could your answer be, "Better than I deserve"? That might get a few people thinking. Someone might ask you, "What does that mean?" Then let your light shine. I deserved to be in big trouble with God. But God sent Jesus to save me. That's being a light. That's letting it shine. I'm gonna let it shine! Amen.