

Matthew 5:13-16

Salt is not salt for its own sake. Nor is light light for its own sake. In the days when Jesus spoke the words of our text, salt was essential for the preservation of food. A lit candle was essential to give light to all in the house. Jesus points to His disciples; He points to you and says, “You are salt...you are light,” not for your own sake, but for the sake of others.

Sooner or later everyone of us asks himself the question, “Why am I here?” For us, the answer is tied to salt and light. God did not put us here to live as hermits. We are not to seclude ourselves from other people. We are to rub shoulders with them. Some of the shoulders we rub against belong to people who love the Lord. Some belong to people who need to know the love of the Lord.

God has not yet transferred you into the kingdom of glory because you are here to be the salt of the earth; you are here to be the light of the world. Other people need you. You have something very few have. You have in your heart the light of the knowledge of the glory of God. You are jars of clay containing the most precious treasure: Jesus Christ.

If you were a multi-billionaire surrounded by people who were poor and sick and in great need, would you seclude yourself from them and refuse to help them? The story is true. This is who you are, in a much greater sense. You are rich with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Most others are not. Why are you here? To be salt and light for their sake.

You and I are Christians today, having the hope of eternal life in Christ, because someone else was the salt of the earth for our sake; someone else was the light of the world for our sake. Had they lost their saltiness; had they hid their light under a basket, you and I, with most in the world today, would be unbelievers.

Sadly, too many Christians have a selfish attitude with regard to their faith. The Christian who says to himself, “I know enough of God’s Word; I don’t need to grow more as a Christian,” does not see himself as salt and light for those in his family, in his congregation, in his community. When you grow in Christ, He spills over to those around you. When you continue to learn more of Him, others are preserved from the evil one because of you. You become a light that brightens more than just your own heart.

But perhaps the problem is that you and I are looking too closely at the unimpressive jar of clay that we are, and not close enough at the treasure we contain. This is easy to do. I fail in this regularly. My feet are sluggish in coming up into the pulpit each Sunday because I have thoughts such as: “Why would anyone want to hear me, let alone look at me? I’m just an earthen clay pot. I’m no better than any of you.” The temptation is for me to hide my light under a basket because I see my humanness, my sinfulness so clearly. “Who do I think I am, to stand up here and offer you anything!”

Who do we think we are? Jesus tells us. “*You are the salt of the earth...you are the light of the world.*” It doesn’t matter how impressive or unimpressive we are to others. We’re not offering ourselves to them. Jesus is offering Himself to them through us.

You are not called to be a missionary or a pastor. You are not servants of the Word. But even better, you are priests of God. A priest was one who made intercession for the people, and who offered sacrifices for the people. This is you. As salt and light, you pray fervently for those who are in need of your prayers; and you offer Him, who sacrificed Himself on a cross for all, by letting your light shine.

It's becoming less popular in our day to be a Christian. We hear more and more of Christians being despised and persecuted in our own country for standing up for Christ. Are we afraid to let our light shine? Are we willing to hide under a basket so that others ignore us and leave us alone? Is this what Jesus commands us? Is this what He did? Did He compromise His teaching in order to get along with others? We know He didn't. They crucified Him because He refused to back down from the truth.

Jesus is the true Light who enlightens every heart. He let them snuff out His light on a cross because of His love for you. You are the salt of the earth because they placed His body in the earth for your sake. You are the light of the world because He burst forth from His tomb in a blaze of light on the Third Day. Your Baptism connects you to Christ in both of these events.

Jesus redeemed you from sin, death, and the devil. He brought you out of darkness to be, for you, your Light and Life, your Forgiveness, and your Salvation. All this He did because He loves you. And this is who lives within you. God's love - Jesus Himself - dwells in your heart. When He asks you, yes commands you, to be salt and light for others, He is speaking as the One who loves them through you.

Jesus is not telling us to do something that is unnatural when He says to be salt and light. Salt naturally preserves food. It is the nature of light to shine. So with you. To not be salt, and to not let your light shine, would be most unnatural. The only way it would be natural for you not to be salty, and not to shine as a light, is if Jesus was not in you.

It would be just as unnatural for God not to love, not to show mercy, not to forgive sinners. He does all these because He is God. And because you are baptized into Christ, who is the love of God; who is God's mercy; and who is our forgiveness, you will shine with love, mercy, and forgiveness for others.

All of us, me included, have not been as salty as we can be. We have been hiding our light more than letting it shine. God forgives you. Believe this, for it is true. This is what God does because this is who He is. He loves you no less if you have been showing His love less to others. You're forgiven. God is merciful to you. And this is why you are salt and light. Only you, who know God's love; who believe that Jesus forgives you, can be salt and light to others. The light of Christ will not come into your home unless you bring it there. Your loved ones will not be preserved from the evil one unless you are salt for them.

This is why you need to grow more and more in Christ. This is why our Sunday worship is so essential. This is why Jesus gives His Sacrament to you often. It's because you, He says, are the salt of the earth, and you are the light of the world. Amen.