

All Because of Jesus

I preach this morning in the name of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

So this morning is the fifth Sunday in Epiphany. Now, in the season of Epiphany, we celebrate and focus our attention on the manifest presence of God in Christ, that began 12 days after Christmas, when the wise men came from the land of Persia bearing their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh; and finalizes six weeks later, on Transfiguration Sunday, when Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up to Mount Tabor to be transfigured, to be changed in their midst.

Now, today we continue in the season of Epiphany. And today, our lesson comes from the Holy Gospel of St. Matthew, the fifth chapter. The words of our lesson are found in the bulletin there in front of you and, as always when I preach, I go through the lesson verse by verse so I always invite you to follow along with me because I'll be going through the lesson in some detail.

Now while you're turning there in your bulletins, let me set the stage for you. Now, the context of Matthew Chapter 5 is the Beatitudes or the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the Good News of the Kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. And large crowds of people followed him from Galilee, from the Decapolis, from Jerusalem, from Judea, and from the region across the Jordan. And as large crowds of people followed him, Jesus sat the people down on the mountainside saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (Mt. 5:3-6).

Blessing after blessing comes from the heart and the lips of Jesus because that's who God is - He is the God who richly blesses. Do you know how blessed you are today? Amen? Do you know how blessed you are today? The fact that your

lungs are breathing, the fact that your heart is beating, the fact that you are here, today, in worship is testimony and evidence that God has been good to you, that the blessings of God are sure and certain in your life. Do you know how blessed you are? Let me hear you say amen! We are blessed by God.

The Lord Jesus Christ has given us His mercies. We are blessed by God. And because we are blessed by God, He calls us to talk like it, verse 13, "You are the salt of the earth," he says. "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."

You are the salt of the earth because of the blessing of Jesus Christ in your life. Because of the goodness of God in your life, you are the salt of the earth. Notice, Jesus did not say, "you will be the salt of the earth." Jesus did not say, "you will become the salt of the earth." No. What did Jesus say? He said, "you are the salt of the earth" [emphasis added]. You see, this is a proclamation. This is a declaration of your identity because of the blessing and the outpouring of God's presence into your life. You will not become the salt of the earth. You are not hopeful, with right actions and right words, to be the salt of the earth. You are the salt of the earth. And to be the salt of the earth is to speak the Word of God faithfully.

To be the salt of the earth is to open your lips and declare the faithfulness of your God who has been good to you in the workplace, in your schools, in your community, when you're going through that line in Wal-Mart that seems to be shut down and all the open lines are there, but only one person is working, to let your light so shine in those places in this world. You are the salt of the earth.

And that means that, like Peter in 1 Peter Chapter 3, to "always be ready to give an answer for the hope that resides within you." To be the salt of the earth is, as Jesus said in Matthew, the tenth chapter, "Do not fear what to say or how to say it. For at that time, I will give you the words, for it will not be you speaking, but it

will be your Father speaking through you" (Matt. 10:19-20). To be the salt of the earth is to speak the word of God faithfully.

So how is God giving you opportunity to speak His word faithfully?

What open door of opportunity is the Lord giving you to let your light so shine before others that they would see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven? What open door is the Holy Spirit leading you to so that you can bring comfort to a grieving heart? To give hope to someone in a hopeless situation?

You are the salt of the earth because of the blessing of Jesus. And you are the light of the world, verse 14, "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 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. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

To be the salt of the earth is to speak the word of God faithfully, and to be the light of the world is to live out the promise of His word convincingly. To be the salt of the earth is to lift your voice high for all to hear the glorious nature of the God who blesses you, the God who pours out his Holy Spirit upon you. And to be the light of the world is to live in such a way where they see you and they say, "I want what's in you. I want the power of the Holy Spirit, the God who is joy, the God who is hope, the God who is purpose, the God who gives me drive in life. That's what I want: to live a life that is different from what you see around you."

You are the light of the world and that means that you live out the promise of His word convincingly. And notice what he says, he says, "You are the light of the world." Again, this is a statement of empowerment. This is a statement of approval. This is a statement of endorsement. And notice, once again, what he did not say. He did not say, "you will be the light of the world." He did not say, "you would be the light of the world." He said, "you are the light of the world" (emphasis added).

If being the salt of the earth is speaking the word of God faithfully, then being the light of the world is living out the promises of God convincingly.

When others see your life, are they asking you for the hope that you have? Are they asking you about the source of your joy, that no matter what kind of a day you are having, they see the bright, and the shining, and the glorious nature of Jesus Christ in you, flowing in you, and out of you? Do they see a transformed life? Do they see somebody who's been with Jesus?

You are the light of the world. That's who you are. And for some, that means being certain that our words are congruent with our life. And for others, like Eddie, it's keeping your Christmas lights up all year long. Check out this video.

We all know people like that, right? I was driving home from the church the other day and there I noticed, off to the side, some Christmas lights and I'm like, "hmmm, they're letting their light shine." My dad was one of those people. My dad would keep his Christmas tree up all year long. I never asked him why. I think it was because he just didn't want to take it down. But you know what? For some people, living out the Gospel, living out the proclamation of who they are in Christ, is being certain that your words are congruent with your life. For others, it's keeping up your lights all year long. If that's you, so be it. As long as you "let your light so shine before others that they see your glorious deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Mt. 5:16). Leave your lights up all year long. That's fine with me. In fact, I would love it if you would. See, because it's a constant reminder that oftentimes, if we're honest, what we say is not congruent with how we live and how we live is not congruent with what we say.

To be the salt of the earth is to speak the word of God faithfully, to be the light of the world is to live out the Word of Promise faithfully.

And to be the righteousness of God is to receive the work of Christ thankfully, verse 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. I tell you the truth, 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. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 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 God."

You see, to be the salt of the Earth is to speak, to declare, to open your lips, and to praise the name of the Lord, your God. To speak the word of God faithfully, to be the light of the world, is to live out your faith convincingly, and to be the righteousness of God is to receive the work of Christ thankfully.

You see, you are the righteousness of God. You will not become the righteousness of God upon the right actions and right motives and right words and right lifestyles. No, you are the righteousness of God, and it's not because of anything you have done. It's not because you have said the right words. It's not because you have prayed the right prayers. It's not even because you are here in church today, doing the right thing. You are the righteousness of God only because of the finished work of Jesus Christ.

For as Jesus hung there on the cross, he said, "It is finished (John 19:30). It is finished. What is "it"? "It" is your sin. "It" is my sin. "It" is the sin of the world. For this is the purpose of Christ, that He left heaven and came to earth to die for you so that you might become the righteousness of God. For every person who has been baptized into Christ, Paul says, "you are a new creation. The old has gone and the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17, paraphrase mine).

You are the righteousness of God, which means that you are to receive the work of Christ for your benefit, for your propitiation, for your imputation, that you might

live out your faith in such a convincing way that those who are living in the reality of their darkness would see the light of Christ shining in and through you.

How is the Lord leading you today to receive the work of Christ?

Maybe that's when you come forward here in a few moments for Holy Communion. You don't come forward and go through the motions because it's what we do as Lutheran Christians. Maybe as you come forward today, maybe for the first time, you come down to the altar because you know that your life is not congruent with your words. You know that your words are not congruent with your life. And instead of going through the motions of our liturgy, maybe for the first time today, you actually come to the altar and you stop and say, "Lord, woe to me, chief among sinners. I receive the work of Jesus."

Because isn't that what the sacrament of the altar is? Isn't that why we come forward? Isn't that why we do what we do? We do it because we need the Lord. We need forgiveness. We need to eat Jesus, for "if you do not eat of my flesh and drink of my blood, you will not inherit the kingdom of God" (John 6:53, paraphrase mine). Isn't that why we do what we do? Because we need the Lord? John said, "Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you have no sin, you have already deceived yourselves" (1 John 1:8). And I would go on to say, don't even begin to come forward until you see your need for Jesus because you are drinking judgment upon yourself. You are the righteousness of God because you are forgiven of your sins.

You are the salt of the earth, so speak like it.

You are the light of the world, so live like it.

And you are the righteousness of God, so let's give Him our thanks.

Amen.