**Matthew 5:13-20 (ESV)**

**13** “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet. **14**  “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. **15**  Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. **16** In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is 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 say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. **19**  Therefore whoever relaxes 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 does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. **20** For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

**“The Light Shines”**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen” (Galatians 1:3-5). There was a debate last week between Bill Nye the Science Guy and Ken Ham of the Creation Museum. Unless you were an internet fan, the news or media did not give it much attention. However, millions still watched looking to an answer for the question, “Is creation a viable model of origins in today’s modern scientific era?” The war between evolutionists and creationists did not end that night. In addition, Bill Nye kept touching on a theme summed up finally in his closing remarks. “I want to remind everybody what is at stake: If we abandon all that we learned, if we abandon the process, if we stop driving forward for the next answer. We in the United States will be out competed by other countries and economies.”

Christians face blame for scare tactics about “going to hell,” but the truth is the Devil has enslaved many to fears that finally deny any faith in God. Jesus today in the reading from St. Matthew goes farther than a needed debate over a Biblical worldview of creation. His Sermon on the Mount was just like God speaking to the people of Israel at Mt. Sinai. Jesus as the head speaks to His body the Church, to the disciples that heard His call to follow Him. Just as the Father sent His Son into a darkened world to suffer and die for sinners. The Son saw His Church to be an epiphany to the world of what God has done, and continues to do, by the Gospel. It means true engagement not merely of darkened cultures, but confessing the one true faith to darkened lives held hostage to the fears of sin, death, and the Devil. Jesus bears witness of His love for us and it makes all the difference in our lives.

Jesus loves to show the identity we have in Him. “You are the salt of the earth.” “You are the light of the world.” The “you” is not speaking to the singular person, but the plural of all who trust in the Gospel promised by God’s Son. There is no such thing as an individualized Christianity made just for me. Those baptized into Christ fully confess that there is, “one Holy Christian and Apostolic Church.” Jesus is not addressing anyone else, great leaders for a time, what is popular for today, but those that take seriously His Word. To be the light and the salt means the many will have one purpose. This identity has nothing to do what we feel or think in terms of men. It all comes from what Jesus says as Savior and Lord of sinners. Without Him telling us “You are.” What can we claim on our own that would not end up in darkness? Only God speaks the identity we have in Him.

Now the identity Jesus gives of salt and light is a wholesome image for His people. Let’s not pass over these words lightly. Salt is relevant from the fact that our food would spoil without it, let alone our bodies need it. Likewise, light is beneficial for any farmer who wants to have a crop grow in the fields. Christ gives the relationship that is so important to our existence to you, His Church, for the sake of the world. “…Christians preserve the earth from corruption. If it were not for the preserving power of Christians, mankind would become a Sodom and Gomorrah. It involves a constant battle” (Bul’s Notes). This battle rests on God’s Word as the foundation for life. The ways of man are naturally deceiving, selfish, and foolishness to God. St. Paul reminds us where our identity comes from saying, “that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.” This power remains with God’s Son who suffered and died for all in a sinful world.

Jesus loves to warn us of the danger of being apart from Him. The salt will lose its saltiness and become useless. The lamp put under a basket shines no light and is useless. How does this happen? When the baptized no longer trusts in the Gospel, when preachers no longer proclaim God’s Word in truth and purity, and when we deny being that city set upon the hill of Him who died for sinners. Lutheran explains it well, “The real salt is the true exposition of Scripture, which denounces the whole world and lets nothing stand but the simple faith in Christ. When this is gone, then it is all over, and all the rest of our teaching and rebuking is worthless…In short, without this article of faith, that we are justified and saved only through Christ and that apart from Him everything is damned, there is no defense or restraint, no boundary or limit for every heresy and error, every sect and faction, with everyone thinking up and broadcasting some peculiar idea of his own.[[1]](#footnote-1)” What alone makes the Church useful to God is Christ working by His Word to save sinners.

The danger faced today is that plenty seek to make the church useful on their terms. It is certainly sad that Thrivent has decided to go the way of a “Financial Neutrality Policy.” They will no longer fund either pro-choice or the 50+ pro-life groups. This action certainly hides the Gospel under a basket, but then again, that is what you get from a business. However, the body of Christ, His Church, cannot sidestep the issue. We are reflections of Him whose redeeming love did not lead us astray or neglect suffering, but bore all sin and shame on His cross. St. Paul tells the baptized, “Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.” If forgiveness is what Christ gives, why hide from His Word of absolution? If His love covers a multitude of sins, why call “sin” something else? If His Word tells us that this is His true body and blood, why disregard His victory feast? The Church is useful when God works by His Word and Sacraments to save and give life.

Jesus loves to see good works glorify His Father because He is the Son. He said, “Let your light shine before others.” So long as works do not turn to self-glorification or justification, God sees great good that can go out to our neighbor in this life. It is bigger than just moral behavior to teach children or laws to uphold in a society. Instead, it is shining with mercy that looks out for others. Isaiah described it well as “to lose the bonds of wickedness… to let the oppressed go free” or “to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house…” Here is love that reflects the God who has come to serve a sinful world. Acts of mercy brings the reality of His redeeming love to others. “The works that serve the church’s preaching of the Gospel is the church withstanding persecution and exercising love to all people. The followers of Jesus stand in his place in the world” (Sermon On The Mount 98). This is not merely humanitarian help as anyone can do. These are works that come from faith unafraid to “glorify the father” by a witness to teach and confess His Son.

Plenty seek to be a good person. Jesus saw such law seekers among the Jews. In their hearts, they were liars and twisters of God’s Word. “For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” The salt and light that we are in Christ is quite distinct from whatever the world wants to do. Works are not the basis for our peace, but the right relationship with the Father is by faith in the Word of His Son. He is our righteousness for no one else can justify and save sinners. St. Paul tells us, “For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Romans 10:3-4). Believing is not a secret, but a gift God has worked by His Word. He tells His baptized Church in the world, “You are salt, you are light.” Jesus bears witness of His love for us and it makes all the difference in our lives. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.

1. Luther, M. (1999, c1956). *Vol. 21*: *Luther's works, vol. 21 : The Sermon on the Mount and the Magnificat* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works (Mt 5:14). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)