

"Salt and Light"  
(Matthew 5:13-16)  
Pastor Espinosa

Introduction: Epiphany is about the light of *Christ...and how His light demonstrates the Gospel, the power of God unto salvation! This light shows how we are saved and freed from sin and death!*

- A. But today's Gospel seems to switch gears in that Jesus is talking about Christians, you and me!
- B. What's up with that?
- C. St. Matthew was being quite intentional and here's how:
  - 1. Jesus is indeed "...the light of the world" (John 8:12)...think of the imagery: light casts out darkness; Jesus casts out darkness!
  - 2. These metaphors are rich in meaning. "Darkness" represents evil, danger, being lost and being unable to find one's way. "Light" represents wiping these terrible things away and bringing God's saving rescue, protection, wisdom, solution, and all of the good things associated with light.
  - 3. And you have been incorporated into Jesus. In Holy Baptism you've been joined to Christ. And where Jesus is, there is His light, so since you are "in Christ" you are also "in His light;" and since Christ is "in you" (both directions are biblical – you in Christ and Christ in you), then His light is also in you. Where Jesus is, there is His saving light; Jesus is with you and there with you and in you is His saving light!
  - 4. This touches on another theme in St. Matthew:

Matthew 6:22f: "The eye is the lamp of the body..." and Jesus goes on to teach that if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be healthy and QUOTE "**full of light.**"

- 5. How does this work? Jesus comes to you through His Word and Sacrament; which is another way of saying that Jesus shines His light upon you. Notice the wording St. Paul uses in Ephesians:

Ephesians 6:14: "...**Christ will shine on you.**"

Jesus is the “founder and perfecter of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2) and in this same verse in Hebrews...we are to be “looking to Jesus”...in so doing you are looking upon the Light of the world...He who is the “radiance of the glory of God” (Hebrews 1:3)...and to look on Him is to look on light; and to look on light is to have that light reflect upon your eyes and if upon your eyes, then into your mind, your heart, your soul, your life!

Picture seeing a person’s eye that is staring at a light or a fire...look closely and you will see the reflection of that light or fire “in their eye” and what is there permeates the mind, the heart, and the soul...we think about what we look at; we desire the things we look at; we strive for the things we look at...His light becomes your light.

Jesus shines upon you and then *in* you...you who have received Christ’s baptism receive His light; you who have received Christ’s forgiveness in absolution receive His light; you who receive Christ’s body and blood, receive His light...you are now – truly and in the most powerful way in accord with the Word of God – truly an *extension* of the Light of the World, Jesus Christ!

This is why St. Matthew wrote this way: ***“You are the light of the world.” (Matthew 5:14)***

6. This is why St. Matthew is seemingly switching gears, but he’s not *really* switching gears, but is still describing Christ, but simply you in Christ and Christ in you.

D. And this is a wonderfully high calling: this means that all Christians, like you and me, are called to help the world see this light that God is the loving and merciful Heavenly Father and that His only-son Jesus is the Savior of the world.

Part I: The problem is that we deal with a gigantic “self-esteem problem” called “sin” (which is far worse than a mere poor self-esteem)!

- A. Every, single day the evil one and our own sinful flesh calls our calling and our identity into question (Gibbs puts “calling” and “identity” side-by-side through our Gospel this morning, *Concordia Commentary: Matthew 1:1-11:1*, St. Louis: CPH, 259).
- B. We are sinful skeptics of the work of God:

1. We are skeptical about God's work of creation.
  2. We are skeptical about God's work of redemption, saving us through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.
  3. But we are also skeptical about the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Our sinful unbelief continually doubts what God's Word says...and this is the fundamental reason as to why we go through so much unnecessary suffering in our lives. We refuse to hold God's Word as sacred and true.
  4. Let me say this as plainly as I can: if we choose to ignore God's Word, we shoot ourselves in the foot; we invite suffering into our lives!
- C. And when we do this we fight against our identities of light.
- D. This is a very serious problem!
1. It is problematic because **first of all** the WORLD misses out! God is saying that the world has a ton of problems and it needs the salt and light that comes from Christians...from you! Otherwise, the world will be overwhelmed by the tidal waves of darkness.
  2. This was a major point of discussion at a Bible Study this past week. Someone mentioned the Grammys, the Music Awards. I missed it. I didn't watch it, but a fellow Christian and member of our congregation did and he told me about it. He described the highest rank of immorality on national television and it made his heart sink. Our children are being told by the media and the culture that this is cool, this is good, this is popular, this is fun...and its trash. And understand, not simply immoral, but that which will lead a person's life into darkness and destruction!
  3. This is why dear Christians that that old saying, you know the one, "never discuss politics and religion," is one of the most ironic ideas in our culture because what we are seeing in the popular media and culture are political and religious ideas and convictions about *how to live life!*
  4. So the real message is this: Christians, **you** be quiet and let the rest of the world shove it's "religion" of immorality and living for self down your throat.
  5. This is the first danger...when we lack faith and confidence to be what Jesus has made us to be, then we let the world degenerate; we allow the world to drown in its sin. This is not love.

One day I was in a social situation at a very large family gathering (I have a huge family...there were well over a hundred people there) and I was conversing with a

group of three others. One of them decided to boldly defend a pro-abortion position and their rationale was amazing: "people have the right to do what they want." That's it. That was their profound argument. It sounds good; it sounds really American and all about freedom; but I assure you that nothing could be further from the truth. Tocqueville in *Democracy In America* discusses the relationship between equality and liberty and says that "among democratic peoples, they are two unequal things." (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing, 2000: 202). Because we dare not lose equality, we are willing to give up liberties. "[We] will put up with poverty, servitude, barbarism, but [we] will not put up with aristocracy." (ibid, 204) So laws are necessary so that people can't "do whatever they want" and become dictators or abusers of others. When we do "whatever we want" then other people die. I was probably tired and a little too agitated and I'm not proud of the way I spoke, but I expanded his self-serving ethic and said, "Yeah, so its ok if another man starts to flirt with your wife, because people have the right to do what they want." The conversation abruptly ended.

Again, I could have been more tactful, but this is the big lie that is going around: "Live and let live; just go along with the flow, esp. if no one is getting hurt," (or something along these nonsensical lines).

1. Smoking affects other people...because other people get the smoke in their lungs.
2. Immorality affects other people...because other people are used and objectivized (treated like objects) OR are tempted to go along with others' immorality.
3. Cursing and swearing and anger affect other people...it increases stress, fear, worry, and anger always produces more anger. Anger is like fire. A little fire leads to a bigger fire; a bigger fire leads to a gigantic fire. Anger has the exact same dynamic. Anger can lead to shouting, shouting can lead to pushing; pushing can lead to striking; striking can lead to crippling; crippling can lead to killing...that's why anger is equated with murder in the Word of God.
4. Laziness affects other people...the less productive you are, the less benefit others derive; the harder you work however, the more people benefit.
5. Abortion affects other people...it affects the baby who is murdered; and it affects the consciences of those who know...it makes them harder and colder; and it leads to guilt and shame that sinks into the soul.

6. The blatant and overt “performances” on national television affect other people...they cause hearts to lust and become filled with temptation; they make young minds hate themselves for not looking like those they see; they mislead others with the message that “this is how you should be.”

Yes, what we do and do not do most definitely affects other people.

7. But the **second problem** is also very dangerous. When we hear Jesus say that salt can be without saltiness or that people do not light a lamp and then put it under a basket...these things are intentionally ludicrous...they make no sense...how can salt not be salt? Why would anyone light a light and then cover it? These are ridiculous ideas. That’s the point and here’s the warning.
8. If you confess to be a Christian, but share no salt and share no light, then your confession is ridiculous; it is meaningless; it is ludicrous...it doesn’t make any sense. And such a so-called “faith,” is good for nothing and is worthy of being thrown out.

Part II: And this is terrifying Law and we wonder if we are in fact nothing but useless.

- A. About the time we hear this, our natural reaction is how can I make myself better? How can I improve? How can I up my game? How can I hone my skills? How can this sinner pull himself or herself up by his or her bootstraps and finally get their act together to become proper salt and light.
- B. Well, this won’t work, but it’s not supposed to! Take heart Christian!

Part III: The words in Matthew 5 are astounding.

- A. The common translation of vs. 16 is “Let [or *allow*] your light to shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”
- B. Jeffrey Gibbs points out the imperative that Jesus used in these words, so that the better translation is: “**I command that your light shine!**” (ibid, p. 259)
- C. Christians, you don’t let or make your light shine. You just don’t. First, it’s not your light [in the sense of having been produced by you or in the sense of it having

been generated by you; only in the sense that you are now a conduit of that which is extended to you]. Second, you don't have the strength to even consider "letting" or "allowing" that light to shine.

- D. Rather, go back to Genesis 1:3 when God said to the nothingness: ***"Let there be light."***
- E. God commanded and by the power of His Word, light came into existence ***out of nothing!***
- F. The same is true here in Matthew 5. God – Jesus – commands light in you. And not by your work, not by letting, or allowing, or trying, or resolving, or tap-dancing, but by one thing: by the power of the Gospel...that your sins are forgiven; that Jesus' light has first of all come upon you; that God in Christ has chased away your darkness and hopelessness. That light reveals that Jesus took your sin and placed it on Himself when He died for you and covered your sin on Himself with His blood. Your sin has been paid for and that light of the Gospel means that the darkness of your sin is GONE! God doesn't see it anymore.
- G. Don't despair. God isn't waiting for you to make your light shine. He has given you His Son. The light of the world is yours...it's true, because your sins are forgiven!

Conclusion: So you have Christ, you have the Light of the World, but HOW does His light shine in you?

- A. He says clearly:

***Matthew 5:16: "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."***

- B. As one who has received the light of Christ in Holy Baptism, now do good works! Again, rejoice! These too were "prepared in advance"! (Eph. 2:10) These too come from the Lord! These are also produced by the Gospel!
- C. We are simply called to keep living in our vocations...living as students, workers, citizens, wives, husbands, mothers, fathers...and know that in these vocations, the Lord has given you gifts and skills and abilities to shine! To live in these vocations *exceptionally! Bring Christ's love into what you do...let people see that you aren't just serving men, but you're serving the Father...show mercy as you've received mercy; show love as you've received love; show loving kindness as you've received loving*

*kindness...these are the things the world needs to see...and let these actions be accompanied by the "good works" of "good words"...let the words match your actions...let them see and hear this light so that your whole life will say to everyone else: "You are loved by God in and through Jesus whose love and mercy shines upon me; and shines upon you!"*