

Salt and Light

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Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church

Pastor Labuhn

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

There is a story of a man that walked into a small store back in the days when our country still had mom-and-pop grocery stores. He said to the owner who was behind the counter, *"Do you sell any salt?"* To which the owner, replied *"Do we sell salt? Just take a look!"* And he pointed to the several aisles that were full of all kinds of salt. There was iodized salt, kosher salt, white and pink sea salt, garlic salt, rock salt, Epsom salt and just about every kind of salt imaginable. *"Wow! I'm in luck!"* said the customer. But the owner, who had come from behind the counter continued talking, *"You think that's something, take a look at this..."* And he opened up the door to the backroom so that his customer could see that his storeroom was completely filled with boxes, bins, and pallets of different kinds of salt. *"Do we sell salt!"* He said. It seemed like outside of a couple of items on the shelves, the whole store was full of salt with no storage space for anything else. Amazed at his good fortune, the customer who had decided to stop at the store, instead of driving farther to a larger store in his search for some salt said, *"Incredible! I'm glad that I stopped. You really do sell salt!"* But surprisingly, the owner said, *"No, I don't! That's the problem! I never sell salt! But the salt distributor - He knows how to sell salt!"*

Last week, as part of our Epiphany readings this year, we started to take a look at Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew. After being revealed as the Son of God at His baptism, Jesus called his disciples and led them up on a hill overlooking the Sea of Galilee to teach them about the kingdom of God. And having shared His Beatitudes with them, He continued to share with them two metaphors – Salt and Light – to enlighten them how they are set apart as His disciples from the rest of the world. Because while it is one thing to be able to recite Scripture like the Scribes of Jesus' time or to act more pious than everyone else like the Pharisees, it's another thing to be a true disciple of God in both Word AND Action.

Jesus shares, ***"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."*** (v.13) There are times in our lives when we hear the Gospel message, it brings light to our souls, and we are encouraged to

let our light shine before others. But when we go out to do so, we can be reminded that we live in a world full of unbelievers, who scoff at religion and find Christians to be hypocritical.

There was once a young pastor and his wife that decided to have all the leaders of the church and their wives over for dinner. They wanted to show all the leaders how their family could be living examples of salt and light in the church. With so many people, it was quite an undertaking to get everything perfectly ready. Finally, they were ready just in time for all of the guests to arrive. Everyone was having a great time and soon it came time for dinner. All were seated and waited for the prayer before beginning to eat the wonderful meal that had been prepared. It was then that the pastor nodded to his wife. She then asked their four-year-old daughter, who was seated next to her if she would like to say grace. But their daughter who was being a little shy said, *"But mom, I don't know what to say..."* Somewhat embarrassed, the mom smiled and said, *"Just say what I say, Honey..."* Then the little girl smiled and agreed. So, everyone bowed their head, and listened to her say, *"Dear Lord, why are we having all these people over for dinner?"*

We can read devotions and come to church. We can say nice prayers aloud and memorize pieces of Scripture and still fail to act in times when God calls on us to minister to others. Knowingly and unknowingly we often fail as His disciples. Like those whom God puts in our lives, time and time again, we find that we ourselves need to hear how we are loved and cared for by God. And sadly, even within the church, more and more people are feeling alone and isolated.

Many of our younger people freely admit that they do not know how to create and be in relationships that are genuine and true. Rather than getting to know our neighbors, many of us find it easier to simply tend to our own affairs. We stop short in sharing our faith because we do not want to come across as proselytizing or taking the chance that we might feel embarrassed when the person we are talking to seems to know more about our faith than we do. Some of us may even work in places where it is said to be "inappropriate" to share our faith, and we hold back in our ministry to others, and only share those things that are socially acceptable.

This morning we hear Jesus say, ***"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. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass away from the Law until all is accomplished."*** (v.17,18) And He goes on to say in verse 20, ***"For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."*** Is there any hope for us at all? Most definitely! Out of His great love for us God sent His dearly beloved Son to us so that both as true Son of God and Son of Man, He might do exactly as He says He will do. Through His life, death, and resurrection, He fulfills the Law and

the Prophets perfectly for us so that we might have forgiveness and new life in Him.

We might not always say or do the right things, and outside of Him, our deeds are as filthy rags. Yet, through our baptism, He declares us His own to be salt and light in this world. By grace through faith, He works in our lives to bring about love and righteousness. His love for us enabled us to receive His righteousness so that we might help and love those around us. In doing so, we are the salt of the earth that preserves, flavors, cleanses, and adds value to the life that God created for all people. It is this "saltiness," these acts of faith that minister to others because of Jesus.

He is our light in this dark world that helps us to see the way that leads to eternal life. In the same way that the moon reflects the sun and brings light to an otherwise dark and dreary night, our lives reflect His light so that others might make their way through this dark world as well. When we get to know our neighbors, we feel more at home in a community rather than people living next to one another in isolation. When we take the time to spend time with those who are lonely, we can brighten their day. Even when we invite co-workers to join a book club that meets here at church, we can bring light into the workplace.

God declares you and me to be salt and light in the world. All we need to do is reflect the light of His love and share the saltiness of the Gospel. Otherwise, we will be like that little mom-and-pop store full of salt but no one to share it with. And this world's needs give us many opportunities to witness the reason for the hope that you have, the joy that He gives to you, and the peace that is yours because of Jesus.

Allow His light to burn brightly in your life, and don't allow the saltiness of the Gospel to go stale. Share it through word and action. If salt is not used over time, it loses its flavor as if it sat too long in a saltshaker or sat for too long in a store waiting to be sold. Allow His Spirit to work through you so that the saltiness of His Gospel might be "sold," and others might see the light of Jesus more clearly in a world filled with darkness. In doing so, together we fulfill the mission that God has given to each of us here at Our Savior's Way, which is to glorify God and make disciples for Jesus by: Forming relationships, experiencing Jesus together, and sharing God's love.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

Service Notes: Salt and Light

1. The Gospel reading today comes from:
 - a. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.
 - b. a time when Jesus taught his disciples.
 - c. a time when Jesus' disciples were called salt and light.
 - d. all of the above.

2. Jesus said:
 - a. "...but if salt loses its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?"
 - b. Salt that has lost its taste, is "no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet."
 - c. "You are the salt of the earth."
 - d. all of the above.

3. God calls us to minister to others:
 - a. yet we knowingly fail from time to time.
 - b. yet we unknowingly fail from time to time.
 - c. yet we cannot fail because of Jesus.
 - d. a and b.
 - e. a, b and c.

4. Jesus says:
 - a. that He came to abolish the Law.
 - b. that He came to fulfill the Law.
 - c. that unless your righteousness exceeds the Scribes and the Pharisees we cannot get into heaven.
 - d. a and b.
 - e. a and c.
 - f. b and c.

5. One thing that I can do to reflect the love of Christ is: