

*In Nomine Iesu*

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Trinity 4  
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Text: Matthew 5:13-16

"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.<sup>14</sup> "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.<sup>15</sup> "Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all *who are* in the house.<sup>16</sup> "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ,

Jesus teaches us about the life of faith and Christian mercy by using two common things: salt and light. Salt and light are both things that we recognize when they are present and that we are aware of when they are missing. Salt is both a flavoring and a preservative. Without the flavor of salt many foods just do not taste right. However, if salt is used as a preservative its lack will be even more obvious. Fish or pork or beef that are supposed to be salted down for use months later can only be thrown out if the salt was never added.

Light is also something much noticed if you have come to depend on it and it is not there. When you lose power in the dead of winter, with only 8 hours of daylight, the long nights are dark and dreary, seemingly endless, without light. A ship on Lake Superior that relies on the beacon of a lighthouse to ward it away from a dangerous shore will founder if that expected light never appears. Driving your car at night without headlights is an entirely different experience than being able to drive with lights on.

Now, as we listen to these words of Jesus we should take note of the fact that He is making a direct identification here. What I mean by that is this: He speaks to His disciples and says "you are...." You are the salt. You are the light. Jesus here is letting us know that as those who believe in Him we are changed from those who are in darkness, to those that are light; from those who need preserving, to those who are part of the preservation.

This change in our status is accomplished within us by the work of Jesus Himself. He is the Light of the world, the light that darkness cannot comprehend and cannot overcome. He has drawn us to Himself through the Gospel, through the proclamation that in Him our sins are forgiven. We who are by nature sinfully blind and decaying in our trespasses are brought to a new state of being through Jesus. No longer are we children of darkness. We are children of light. As St. Paul teaches in Ephesians: “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth)....”

This change that God has worked in us is what lies at the heart of our living now as the children of God. To be light and to be salt for this world is something God-given, and not of our own choosing or doing. This is understood at the end of this section when the effects of our being light and salt is that others see our good works, and then do what? Do they praise us for being good? No, they glorify our Father in heaven. This puts away from us any sense of self-glorifying in the works God is able to do through us as His children in this world.

The question then remains: what exactly does it mean that Jesus calls us the salt and the light of this earth and world? Basically it means that we will be known for what we are. Salt cannot be hidden – it is noticeable. Light also, while it can be hidden, is useless when such happens. God has not made you the light of the world in order for you to live your lives hidden in a bushel basket with no benefit for others.

Now, if you consider the story in Genesis about Sodom and Gomorrah you will get an idea of your value as salt in your community. God was ready to spare the grossly sinful twin cities of Sodom and Gomorrah if only there were just 10 believers in them. But even that small number was not found. Therefore the preservative function of God’s people, missing in those cities, resulted in their total destruction. The world is preserved from final judgment by the salt of God’s Christian people.

As such salt, we are given responsibility. A theologian noted that many people think it would be good if they had the authority and power to make the

changes they know would be best for their community, for their nation. But what many fail to realize is that with such power and authority comes responsibility. You are the salt of the earth. This means something for how you live your life among the people God has put you. It may very well mean suffering for the sake of the Gospel, as you follow in the footsteps of your Savior who suffered, and went to the cross for us. It will also point us to lives of mercy for those whom God puts in our paths.

Mercy is the compassion for those who need our help, and by compassion I mean a love that acts for the good of others. Mercy is never just a feeling for others, as if being sympathetic to the hurts of others is helpful to them. No, they need us to act, to do more than just “feel their pain.” When we consider our Savior’s mercy and compassion we are confronted time and time again with His actions. His whole life, from conception to resurrection and beyond, is one of acting for others out of a love for them that would not allow the obstacles of satanic deception or worldly rejection to entice Him from the goal of salvation for the world.

Certainly we will know many obstacles to our good intentions of mercy, charity, and compassion. The weakness of our sinful flesh will cringe at the thought of giving up something so that others might be helped. The world will always be either luring us to focus on ourselves through greed and coveting, or by seeking the glory for ourselves instead of our heavenly Father. And Satan, who never wants God to receive the glory, will seek to insure that we are side-tracked from helping others into more lofty philosophical ideals that finally never help anyone in real life.

Here is where we rely on the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word of God to push through those obstacles. We are enlivened and invigorated by the Gospel, the forgiveness of sins, a charity from God to us that is so deep, so rich, so eternal, that we cannot help but shine in the lives of others. “For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

In the past weeks God has provided us with many opportunities for mercy and charity. Some are very close to home, others are farther away. We should not become overwhelmed at the number of such opportunities, even though one becomes almost numb from seeing the devastation in our state, and on farms we know. God knows that we are limited with money, with time, with strength. But such limits do not allow us to remain content to do nothing. Rather, we are called to be the light and salt for the places where God has put us, and for the support of others who can do what and go where we cannot. Let us pray that God would help us to grow in being what He says we are by His grace, by His free gift.

It is a great honor for our Lord to put us in times of trial and struggle. It often doesn't seem very honorable. But the way of the cross never is, in the eyes of the world. Our Lord never tired of being merciful to individuals, even while on His way to the sacrificial death for us all. May the God who has opened our hearts and minds by His saving Gospel of the forgiveness of all our sins, open our eyes and ears to the needs of our own day, that by our good works our gracious heavenly Father may receive the glory and praise of the people who see the light that we are. In the name of Jesus. Amen.