

6 February 2011
Epiphany 5

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Being Who You Are”

Text: Matthew 5:13-20 (1 Corinthians 2:1-16)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our Lord says some pretty amazing things in the Scriptures. Surprising things. Last week we heard the Beatitudes; that blessed are those we don't normally consider blessed. Jesus' way of doing things isn't quite the same as that of the world.

This week, Jesus' amazing and surprising words continue, for today He says: **You are the salt of the earth; you are the light of the world.** What is not surprising is that the earth is evil and corrupt and needs to be salted; that the world is shrouded in the darkness of sin and death and needs to be lighted. That we know. That we experience every day. What is surprising is not the *what*, but the *who*. **You** are the salt of the earth. **You** are the light of the world. **You**, Jesus says to His disciples. **You**, Jesus says to you and me.

Several thoughts come to mind . . .

First, that's quite a task! And one that, perhaps like me, you don't think you're really up to. I'm sure the disciples who heard those words didn't think they were. For who are you? And what can you do? Little you in the midst of so much evil and corruption. Just you in the midst of such deep darkness. Perhaps you are tempted to think: If I'm the light of the world, then this world's going to be pretty dark. If I'm the salt the earth, then this earth's going to be pretty rank and rotten.

But our Lord says what He means and means what He says. Which leads to a **second** thought: It's not the ones the world thinks enlightened, or wise, or progressive, or salty that Jesus calls His salt and light; not those of **lofty speech and wisdom**, as St. Paul said. But those who are simply followers of Jesus. Disciples. **You are**, Jesus says. You are . . .

Which, **third**, is an *indicative*. It's not an imperative, a command. Jesus is not saying you have to, must be, or should be this - it is what you ARE. It is what your Saviour has worked in you and made you by His grace.

The challenge is to BE who you ARE. To live as a spiritual being and not just an

animal who lives and eats and procreates. To live in the image of God and not try to be the image of others in the world - sports stars or celebrities or others we think successful. To live as one redeemed by Christ the crucified. That is a challenge because satan is constantly tempting you to BE something else, something less than you are, and making that less look like more. But do not be fooled. You are more than all that. You are a child of God who has been illuminated in Holy Baptism. You are a child of God who has been salted by the Holy Spirit. That is who you ARE.

*And so you are that which salts the earth.
You are that which gives light to the world.*

That is your identity - and, your calling. It is part and parcel of your life in Christ. No one else has this calling. Only children of God in Christ Jesus. And so enlightened by Him, Jesus says, BE who you ARE. **Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.**

These words of Jesus today reveal that God has vested you with an incredible honor and purpose in life. That your life is not pointless or useless. That to be a child of God is not like standing on the corner waiting for the bus to heaven, but to be living, breathing Gospel. To live not on the *defensive*, just trying to survive, but on the *offensive* against satan, your good works like salt on that satanic slug; your good works like light that scatters his demonic cockroaches.

For satan likes it to be dark, yes he does. For forgiveness to go unspoken, and grudges and hurts to be held fast. For disagreements to turn into avoidance to turn into loneliness. For love to grow cold and so for us to forget about one another and focus only on ourselves.

But what has Jesus done? Not only has He come as the light of the world (John 8:12), shining the light of God's love and forgiveness and life into a dark world of sin and death, He has enlightened and scattered His Christians throughout this world, that wherever you are - at home or school, at work or church, anywhere and everywhere - you be the salt and light of Christ. For that is what you are.

For what has Jesus done? **He fulfilled the Law and the Prophets.** Which is to say, all the demands of the Law placed upon you, He fulfilled. All the promises of God given to you, He fulfilled. All the grace of God given to you. All the life of God provided for you. All the righteousness of Christ imputed to you. And all the forgiveness and Spirit of Christ, poured out upon you.

St. Paul said the same thing (just in different words) when He told the Corinthians that **[He] decided to know nothing among [them] except Jesus Christ and him**

crucified. For it is on the cross where Jesus said: *it is finished; it is accomplished; it is fulfilled* (John 19:30). And so His resurrection to life again was not just good news for Him, but good news for us. For that is our new life. The life of Christ which is no longer captive to sin and death - to the old way of things, in the darkness - but a life set free.

And in this freedom we do not set aside the commandments of God, and we don't just *do* them, like homework - we *live* them. For as Christ fulfilled them in His life, so He fulfills them - by His Spirit - in our lives. That in His love and forgiveness, you be *extraordinary* husbands and wives, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters; you be *remarkable* neighbors and workers; you be *powerful* friends and citizens. For that is what you are. You are a child of God.

You'll fail at that, of course. You will succumb to the temptation to not BE who you ARE; you'll settle for ordinary; you're sinful nature will get the better of you; you'll fear the thrashings about of satan instead of seeing them for what they truly are - the death throes of a defeated enemy.

That's why it's important that you're here. To be continually raised and restored in the forgiveness of your sins, salted with the Spirit, illumined with the truth of God's Word, and fed by your Saviour's Body and Blood. That by *His Strong Word*, you be raised and enlivened, absolved and strengthened, and have the life and mind of Christ. To BE who you ARE.

Yes, by *His Strong Word*, as we sang (LSB #578). For truly it is not us at all. We are like St. Paul, among those in the world ***in weakness and in fear and much trembling***. But we don't usually regard Paul as weak, do we? He was extraordinary, wasn't he? An extraordinary preacher and missionary and servant of God! . . . It was not him, was it? But the Strong Word of God, the Word made flesh, living in him. That was his strength and his life.

And so it is for you. His Strong Word that cleaved the darkness at creation, His Strong Word that cleaved the darkness in His incarnation, His Strong Word that cleaved the darkness in His death and resurrection, is His Strong Word that now bespeaks you righteous and forgiven and gives you life. And no ordinary life, but His own life, the life of Christ. A new life to live even now, with tongues that sing His glory, throats that shout the hope that fills us, mouths which speak His holy name, and, we could add, hands and hearts that do His will.

For that is who you ARE in Christ. That is His work in you. And being who you are, ***you are the salt of the earth and the light of the world***. You are Christ's and He is yours. Don't settle for less.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.