

9 February 2014
The Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Nothing but Jesus Christ and Him Crucified”
Text: Matthew 5:13-20; 1 Corinthians 2:1-12

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

I would have loved to see the looks on the disciples faces when Jesus said to them: ***You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.***

They hadn't been following Jesus for that long. Not that long ago they were fishermen and tax collectors, listening to John the Baptist and sitting under fig trees. They were married, they were single, they were doing what folks did. Just a short time before this, these twelve could never have imagined all the changes that were going to take place in such a short time. And now, this group - some friends, some brothers, some strangers before this no doubt - were now “the twelve.” The twelve disciples, sitting with Jesus and listening to Him teach.

And then they hear this: ***You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.***

Uh . . . Jesus . . . isn't that *you*? Not us!

Isaiah said so. Remember what we heard at Christmas? *The people walking in darkness have seen a great light. . . . For to us a child is born* (Isaiah 9). Simeon said so. We heard his words last week, that Jesus is *the light that enlightens the Gentiles* (Luke 2). We? We're not really up to that . . .

Maybe you feel the same way. Jesus first spoke those words to the twelve, to the first generation of Christians, but now also to you. You, who maybe haven't been a Christian that long. You, who maybe don't think you know so much. You, who (if you're like me) have a hard time being salt and light in your own family! So . . . *the salt of the earth? The light of the world?* That's not me!

But Jesus says it is. Notice that these words are not a command. Jesus is not saying you have to, must be, or should be this. So get out there and get to work! No. He says ***you are***. This is who you are as Christians. This is what *your Saviour* has done. This is what your Saviour worked in you and made you by His grace. As Christians baptized into Christ and recipients of His Spirit, what He is you now are. You are sons of God. You are forgiven your sins. You are inheritors of heaven. You are His bride, the Church. You

are His salt and light in a rotten and dark world. That wherever you go, He be. To preserve and enlighten a world in deep darkness and rotting in death.

Still sounds like a tall order though, doesn't it? You may be thinking: I'm just an old man or an old lady! Or, I'm just a kid. I'm just a worker that gets up before the sun comes up and gets home after it goes down. I'm just a stay at home mom. I'm just . . . *How can I be this?*

Well here, I think, is where St. Paul can help us. For when he went to the city of Corinth, remember how he described himself - what we heard earlier? He said he came not with lofty speech or wisdom. He came in weakness and fear and much trembling. His speech and message were not in plausible (or *persuasive*) words of wisdom. (Or in other words, he didn't know all the rhetorical tricks and flourishes so common to the great speakers in that city.) Sounds like us! Sounds like, maybe, the twelve. Therefore, he said, ***I decided (or I resolved) to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*** Which means everything Paul did, everything he said, everything he lived, was just this: *Jesus Christ and Him crucified.*

And it is all that because as I often tell my Bible classes (and they could probably finish my sentences here!) to *know* something - biblically - is *more* than just knowledge. It's *more* than just what's in your head. A lot more. For example, as Scripture tells us in Genesis, Adam KNEW his wife Eve and she conceived a bore a child. That's not just mental, right? It's *more* than that. A lot more. It's a union. It's a communion. It's a life.

And so, to adopt and adapt that biblical understanding here, we could say that to KNOW *Jesus and Him crucified* is for Jesus to be conceived and born in you, and for you to be born from above in Him. It is for *Jesus and Him crucified* to grow in you. For *Jesus and Him crucified* to live in you. A life of *Jesus and Him crucified* started in baptism, sustained by His absolution, and fed by His Body and Blood. You in Him and He in you. Jesus the salt and light, making you salt and light to a dark and rotting world.

And that is so because long before you and I or Paul or the twelve, the Son of God resolved to BE *Jesus the Christ and Him crucified*. To fulfill the Law and the Prophets. To accomplish that righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees. *For you*. For we don't fulfill the Law . . . and our righteousness? Well, that doesn't even exceed an anthill, or even worse, it's a hole - a hole of sin we've dug ourselves into, that just keeps getting deeper and deeper with no way out. A hole that, turns out, is really a grave.

And that's exactly why the Son of God resolved to BE *Jesus the Christ and Him crucified*. To go down into our graves that we've dug in sin and pull us out. To raise us with Him to a new life. A new life no longer defined by what we're not or what we lack,

but by what we are and what we have been given. That we are sons of God in the Son of God and given His life, a life that will never end.

Which makes us salt in a rotten world and light in a darkened world. Again, that's not what you have to be, must be, or should be; that's not a new Law for you to fulfill and achieve - it's what you ARE. In Christ. So BE who you ARE. All you say, all you do, and all you live be *Jesus Christ and Him crucified*.

Which *doesn't* mean you go around beating people up with the Bible! That's not what Jesus did. Yes, He spoke the Law, He spoke the truth, but it was always in compassion, always to save, always with an eye to forgiveness. The forgiveness He won in His crucifixion, and now risen from the dead lives to give to you.

And so now you. *Let you light shine before others*, Jesus said, *that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven*. You see, light doesn't shine because it has to, but because that's what light does. So you too.

For Satan likes it to be dark, yes he does. And rotten. He loves for forgiveness to go unspoken, and grudges and hurts to be held fast and fester. For disagreements to turn into avoidance to turn into loneliness and separation. For love to grow cold and so for us to forget about one another and focus only on ourselves. Every man for Himself. Live and let live.

But *Jesus Christ and Him crucified* is salt on that satanic slug. *Jesus Christ and Him crucified* is the light that scatters his demonic cockroaches. *Jesus Christ and Him crucified* in you is the light that shines before others and produces those good works, those Christ works, those forgiveness works, those compassion works, those mercy works, that glorify your Father who is in heaven. For *Jesus Christ and Him crucified* is a light that shows us what love really is and what life is meant to be. A union and communion with God. A union and communion with each other.

And so you are who you are because Jesus is who He is. All gift. And when you succumb to the temptation to not be who you are, to sin, *Jesus Christ and Him crucified* is here still, to raise and restore you in the forgiveness of your sins, to salt you with His Spirit, illumine you with the light of His truth, and strengthen you with His Body and Blood.

For in *Jesus Christ and Him crucified*, you are (as we sang) the *Church of God, Elect and Glorious* (LSB #646). The Church of God with hope and a future. The Church of God in this world but not of this world. The Church of God wherever Jesus scatters you in this world, to be His living, breathing Gospel. To be His gift to others. To be salt, to be light. To bring hope and love. To speak forgiveness and show mercy. To be who you are: a child of God. And to live the life you've been given: a life that will never end. And maybe like the twelve, you'll be surprised at the difference that makes.

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.