

Salt, Light, and a City

Matthew 5:13-20

The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany, February 5, 2017

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

So you blessed people, you are the salt of the earth.

You blessed people, you are the light of the world.

You disciples of Jesus Christ, you are a city that is set on a hill and it cannot be hidden.

What does it mean to tell you that you are the salt of the earth? Why salt?

It is because of everything that salt is. Salt is a preserver. So you are the preservers of the earth. Without you the earth would be lost. Salt is a necessity of life. So you are life givers. Without you the earth would die. Salt is also used to kill those things which are unwanted. So without you those things that God does not want in the world would grow out of control.

These things are true of you because your Lord has declared you to be blest. These things are true of you because the Lord has declared them to be true. You, the ones whom Jesus our Lord has blessed, bring life to the world. You do this by killing those things which God does not want. In so doing you preserve the world.

It is possible for you to lose your saltiness. In other words it is possible for you to lose your life giving power. It is possible for you to lose the ability to put to death those things which God wants to put to death. When you lose these powers, you lose the power to preserve the world. If you have lost your saltiness you are no longer good for anything. You may as well be trampled by men. After all, you are not doing the world any good.

What does it mean when He tells you that you are the light of the world?

Light also gives life. Without it all things die. Light also gives direction. It prevents people from wandering in the darkness. Light also gives hope. A person who is lost in the dark takes hope when he sees light.

So you, the disciples of Jesus, give life to the world. You give it direction. You give the world hope. You do this because the Lord declares that you do this.

That is why it makes no sense for you to hide yourselves. Why would you take a lamp and put it under a basket? That doesn't make sense. It makes more sense to take the light and put it on a stand so that it may shine to all those in the house.

So, let your light shine that people may see your good deeds and give praise to your Father in the heavens.

And once again Luther was right. Luther famously said, "Your good deeds are not for God. They are for your neighbor." What is meant by that is this. God does not need your good deeds. It does not help God if you do good deeds or not. Furthermore, you are justified before God by faith in Jesus Christ and not by your good deeds. Not only does this mean that faith is not a good deed, it also means that God does not need your good deeds. He does not even need your good deeds to save you. He is quite capable of saving you without you having to do one single thing. Most of you were baptized as infants anyway and that should teach you clearly enough that God does not need any of your good deeds to save you. He has already done so in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Your neighbor on the other hand cannot live without your good deeds. This is not only true in this life it is also true in the life to come. In this life your neighbor needs you to fulfill your vocation in

order to survive. The rest of us cannot survive unless we have those engaged in agriculture, food production, education, medicine, economics, and a host of other vocations that we need. Your neighbor needs you to do what you do, and you need your neighbor to do what he does.

But our Lord is not talking about life in this world. He is talking about life in the world to come. He is talking about eternal life. Because you are disciples of Jesus Christ, those who are not disciples of Jesus Christ cannot survive unless you do good deeds. Your good deeds will move them to give glory to your Father in heaven and when they do, they have just become disciples of Jesus too.

Ok. So we are to let our light shine by doing good deeds. What good deeds should we be doing?

Well, do not think that Jesus came to abolish the Law or the prophets. Jesus did not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it. Not one dot or stroke of the pen of the Law will disappear until heaven and earth disappear. Since heaven and earth have not disappeared, the Law has not lost any of its letters nor has it lost the least stroke of a pen.

What Law is Jesus talking about when He says this? He is talking about the Law of Moses. You may find the commandments of Moses in the first five books of the Bible. That is the Law that Jesus is saying will not disappear until heaven and earth disappear. That is the Law that you are to keep in order to let your light shine in front of people so that they may give glory to your Father in heaven.

Well, how do we do that? Have you not heard about the arguments online? Perhaps you have encountered these in your daily life.

Let me outline the problem. A devout Christian person will post something online pointing out that homosexuality is a sin. In the comments section of that post someone else will post that if you are going to insist that homosexuality is a sin, you had better get busy and start sacrificing sheep and goats. The reason that someone puts that in the comments section is because the same Law of Moses that condemns homosexuality also commands that you sacrifice sheep and goats and bulls and rams. Why are we keeping one part of the Law and not all of the Law when our Lord has just said that He did not come to abolish the Law, but rather to fulfill it? If it is not abolished should we not be doing all of it?

Well, let me take just three examples from the Law of Moses and show you how Jesus fulfills it and then explain how it is that you keep the Law of Moses even though Jesus has fulfilled it. What I am about to do with these three examples can be done with all of the Law of Moses such that all of the precepts of Moses are kept in your life and your light will thus shine before people.

The first example I want to deal with is the tabernacle.

There are many chapters in the Law of Moses which command the construction of the tabernacle. The tabernacle is an elaborate tent in which God lived on earth. Under Moses Israel built the tabernacle according to God's instructions.

When the people of Israel entered the Promised Land, they brought this tent with them. When Solomon became king over Israel with God's endorsement, Solomon built a permanent structure to replace the tabernacle. It was the temple. The temple was a building rather than a tent. God moved from the tabernacle to the temple, when the Israelites took the ark of the covenant out of the tabernacle and moved it into the temple. God demonstrated that He endorsed this move by filling the temple with the same cloud with which He had filled the tabernacle at the time of Moses.

Even though the temple was burned and rebuilt, it was still in place as the dwelling place of God on earth at the time of our Lord. When our Lord enters the temple, He drives out all those who are buying and selling there. When the Jews ask Him for a sign to prove that He has the authority to do all of this, Jesus tells them that if they destroy this temple, He will rebuild it in three days. The Jews

misunderstand what the Lord is talking about. They think that He is talking about the temple building, but Jesus was really talking about His body. The Jews did destroy the body of Jesus and Jesus did rebuild it in three days. Therefore Jesus' body is the new temple. He is the new location where God dwells on the earth. Jesus Himself constructed this temple for a dwelling place of God on earth. He did it when He rose from the dead.

Therefore the tabernacle that God commanded to be built has been built by Jesus. It is His body. That means that if we go and build a temple in Jerusalem or build a tabernacle for sacred use, that we are building a false temple and a false tabernacle because the only true tabernacle and true temple is the body of Jesus itself.

That is why we do not let our light shine by building a tabernacle or temple, but at the same time that does not mean that we have not kept the Law. The Law has been kept. The tabernacle of God has been built. It is the body of Christ.

The second example I want to consider is the sacrifices of the Law.

God commanded that sacrifices be made. He commanded animal sacrifices of various kinds. There were sacrifices that He commanded to commemorate His saving actions in the past. There were sacrifices that He commanded to atone for people's sins. There were sacrifices that He commanded as celebrations of His blessing. All of them involved the slaughter of animals.

The people of God started sacrificing these animals as soon as God commanded it. They sacrificed animals for thousands of years until the time of our Lord.

When our Lord comes on the scene and is baptized, John the Baptist, under instructions from God the Father declares that Jesus is the Lamb of God.

When John the Baptist makes that declaration with the authority of God, Jesus is destined to be slaughtered. You know the end of the Gospel accounts. You know that Jesus was slaughtered. His blood was shed. His blood atones. His blood saves. His blood restores all things. Jesus fulfills His vocation to be the Lamb of God. He dies.

But when John the Baptist says that Jesus is the Lamb of God and when Jesus dies upon the cross, the sacrifice that fulfills all sacrifices has been made. In other words once John the Baptist calls Jesus the Lamb of God with God's authority, Jesus is the Lamb of God. If Jesus is the Lamb of God, then the animals that the Jews continued to sacrifice even after Jesus came were no longer the lambs of God. That means that if you and I were to sacrifice lambs today, we would not be fulfilling the Law. We would be sacrificing the wrong Lamb of God. The Lamb of God has already been sacrificed. He does not need to be sacrificed again.

John the Baptist's declaration needs to be taken in a comprehensive sense. If Jesus indeed intends to fulfill all of the Law, then He does not merely fulfill the sacrifices of the lambs, but of the bulls, the rams, the goats and whatever other sacrifice God commanded in the Law of Moses.

Once again the Law has been kept for us. Jesus was sacrificed and that part of the Law of Moses is kept. If we try to sacrifice animals we will be sacrificing the wrong sacrifice because Jesus is the Lamb of God, not the lambs with wool on them that go "baa."

The third example that I want to take is the priesthood.

In the Law of Moses God commanded a priesthood. The priests of God were to be Aaron and his descendents. God commanded special clothing for them. God commanded that sacrifices be made to ordain them. God commanded that they be washed at their ordination.

When Jesus comes He ordains His own set of priests. It happens to be all of you. The book of Revelation teaches that by His blood Jesus has prepared for Himself a kingdom of priests. In 1Peter 2:9 it says that you are a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people who belong to God. You are the order of the priests that God has commanded once Jesus fulfills the Law.

Since the sacrifice of blood required for forgiving sin has already been made by Jesus Himself and does not need to be repeated since He atoned for the sin of the whole world, what is left for you priests to do? The only commandment that Jesus does not fulfill on your behalf is the eating of the sin offering. The Law of Moses commanded the priests to eat the meat of the sin offering. In the fulfillment Jesus is the sin offering and you are the priests. God therefore commands you in His Law to eat the sin offering. This would be impossible unless Jesus had made provision for you to do so. He made such provision when He instituted the Sacrament of the Altar. He bids you to come forward and eat His body. When you do that you are fulfilling your priestly calling to eat the sin offering.

And when you do this you are doing the Law of Moses. When you do the Law of Moses you are letting your light shine before men that they may see you going to the Sacrament of the Altar and give glory to your Father who is in the heavens.

This is why 1Corinthians 11 states that as long as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

There are other parts of the Law of Moses whose referents are not changed in this fashion by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. That includes the commands regarding homosexuality, but it also includes other commands. Honor your father and your mother still refers to Your father and mother. The fulfillment of Jesus has not altered what that command is referring to. You shall not murder remains unaltered. You shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony against your neighbor and you shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor remains unchanged by the death and resurrection of Jesus. Therefore those commandments may be kept in order to let your light shine before others.

The Sabbath Day is altered because Jesus has given you the eternal Sabbath rest. I would have used that as an example of one that transformed by the fulfillment of Jesus, but I do not want to talk too long.

Not taking the Name of the Lord in vain and not having any other gods besides Him are still in effect.

Once again this is not to justify yourselves before God. If you want to use the Law to justify yourself before God, then your righteousness is going to have to exceed the scribes and the Pharisees. These good deeds are what salt does to put to death what God wants put to death so that the life of the world is preserved. These good deeds are what light does to shine the truth upon others. These good deeds cannot be hidden. Even if you follow the ones where Jesus tells you to keep them a secret, they will not be hidden. You do the Law and your light will shine. People will see your good deeds and give glory to your Father who is in the heavens.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.