

Fifth Sunday After The Epiphany – 2023

Isaiah 58:3-9a

1 Corinthians 2:1-16

Matthew 5:13-20

You are the salt of the earth. Do you know what that means? Nearly three years ago the world was coming unglued. The world is going to that somewhat regularly. The world is unreliable. The world is unwise. Unbelief leads directly to a lack of wisdom. Nearly three years it was said from this pulpit that the strength that is in us was to be lent to the culture around us. That's what it means to be the salt of the earth. That's what it means for the church to be the light of the world.

If you are going to have a tug of war and you are building your line-up, you are settling the sequence of men on your side who are going to pull that rope, who do you put at the very end? Who is the anchor on your team, the bull-moose of a man who will not budge, who will hold the team together, who will use his natural assets to ensure that the team will remain stable, who will ensure that the team won't be pulled by the other side? Do you put Shaquille O'Neal at the anchor or Pee-Wee Herman? That's what it means to be the salt of the earth. You, Christian man, Christian woman, you are the anchor on the tug of war team. Do you know why? You have a wisdom and a courage and a divine power in you that the world does not have. You are to lend your virtue to the world around you so that they might profit. You are not to be embarrassed about being the salt of the earth.

What has God vested you with? What has Mighty God placed in your possession that is good for the world around us? He has given you faith. You see the world aright. You know that God created the world in six days, you know that man – male and female – are made in His image. You know that sin brings death and that God is just. You know that in love the Almighty sent His Only-Begotten Son into our flesh to live a perfect life, to die on the cross bearing our sins, to rise again to bring us new life. You see the world aright. You are the salt of the earth. You know that death has no sting. You know that the grave is defeated. You know that heaven is open to all who believe. That's what makes you useful to the world around you. USEFUL; God has made you tremendously useful.

Three years ago, the notion was undeniable – we had to lend our strength, the strength that God has given us, to the world around us. It is not prideful to say that the church is wiser than the world. It is not prideful to say that the church is more courageous than the world. St. John wrote this: “Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is at work in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4). What makes us wise? What makes us courageous? We know how to look at death. “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31). “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (Psalm 27:1). You have been liberated from fear. You have been liberated from selfishness and despair. You are a new man, a new woman (2 Corinthians 5:17). You know that the Lord Christ has risen from the dead (Matthew 28:6). You know that you are a forgiven and treasured child of God (John 3:16). You know that His dominion is from sea to sea (Psalm 72:8). You know that all that you are belongs to Him (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). You know that He is full of grace and that nothing can snatch you out of

His hand (John 10:28). You also know that this life is full of difficulty (Acts 14:22). All that makes you the salt of the earth. You are of benefit to others; great benefit.

Three years ago the world was coming unglued. Did we lend the strength that is in us to the world around us? How well did we do? It's going to happen again. In one form or another, the world will chase some white rabbit down a hole and we will have another opportunity to be exactly what God wants us to be. We are not going to stop being the salt of the earth. Salt is a preservative and it is a flavoring. What does the church preserve? The church preserves sanity. The church preserves truth. The church preserves virtue and justice and hope and human dignity. The church preserves God's name. The church preserves life and marriage and the good news of salvation in Christ. Salt is also a flavoring. What is the essential flavor of the church? Joy! We know what is holy. We know what beauty resides in God's Word. We know the unparalleled joy of Easter. We know that resurrection invades our mortal frame. Joy! Christ's love is real and present. He calls us each by name and has prepared a place for us at His wedding banquet. What does that generate? It generates joy! The church is filled with it. The savor of life in Christ is so wonderfully delicious! The world gets to know the joy of Christ through you. You are the salt of the earth.

Three years ago it was obvious; the strength in us was to be lent to the world around us. Fear gripped the masses. Panic really; unwise choices on the part of authorities; the church seemed content to take a back seat. You are the salt of the earth. If salt loses its saltiness it is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet (Matthew 5:13). How might the church lose its saltiness? By abandoning God's Word; by adopting worldly philosophy; by acting as though Jesus is still in the tomb, that heaven is closed, that life in this world is the most precious thing we have. Did the church at large do any of that? Did you do any of that? God has made you salt and light. Is that a privilege or a responsibility? It's both, right? The world is going to come unglued again. Do you suppose that your devotion to God during times of upset might be a comfort to those who are looking for strength in their own lives? You can't hear Jesus telling you that you are the salt of the earth and not take it seriously. It means something! It means something good and valuable and applicable and concrete and delightful.

Christ's church is a city on a hill. Christ the King Lutheran Church is light to our community. Hope is always in season here. God's Word is a light to lighten the path of life, to direct our footsteps that we lead useful, productive, faithful and blessed lives. The light of Christ shines in this place and that light is in you. You are the light of the world. Let your light so shine so that others may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. Christ's righteousness is the light in this place. We are only unworthy servants. His righteousness is our treasure. Holy God lends us His strength. When we were mired in sin and death, the eternal Son of God came to us. Not to lead a seminar on victorious living but to die a wretched death. That is the love He has for you. That is the love you possess. That is the love we celebrate.

Jesus took His place on that cross for you and He bore your sin; took it away; it is gone. His righteousness shines from the Holy Cross. His righteousness shines from the Holy Word. His righteousness shines from our Holy Altar where His Holy Body and Holy Blood are given to sinners. We have no righteousness of our own. We have His. That makes us the salt of the

earth. His righteousness makes us the light of the world. We lend it to the world around us, when all seems peaceful and when the world is coming unglued. Christ's righteousness never loses its flavor. Christ's righteousness can't be hidden. The crucified King is the anchor on our team. He doesn't move. His grace can't be undone. His love can't be altered. He gives Himself to the world through you. You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.