

Fifth Sunday After the Epiphany – 2026

Isaiah 58:3-9a

1 Corinthians 2:1-16

Matthew 5:13-20

A city on a hill does not *want* to be hidden. The reason that a city is built on a hill is for it to be seen. When pilgrims are journeying from afar, the city is meant to be seen, to draw people to it (drawn to its strength, its provision, its community). Christ the King Lutheran Church is that city. Christ's church throughout the world is that city. The Kingdom of God draws people. There's a reason for that. It's not because the world is boring that you are here this morning. It's not because there are no chores at home; you could be doing sudoku right now; you could be making biscuits; you could be sipping coffee and watching something wretched on Netflix – I guarantee that many folks are. God's Spirit has pulled you. The eyes of your hearts have been enlightened by truth, by Him who is the Light of the world (Ephesians 1:18; John 8:12). God Himself has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9). Christ's glory has illuminated your heart, and you have been drawn into His realm, His reign and His rule (2 Corinthians 4:6). By virtue of God's operation in your life you have an identity, a transformative identity. Ultimately, Christians embrace their identity. We love who God has made us to be. We treasure our identity. Not out of pride, but out of appreciation, we treasure our identity. What are we? We are salt and light.

None of you *achieved* this identity. We were claimed from the rubbish heap. We were under the sway of our sinful flesh, captive to the prince of darkness, mesmerized by the world and its vanity. God has transformed you by bringing to bear on you the power of Christ's cross, the power of Jesus' resurrection, the power of His redeeming love. It's no use denying it: Jesus calls you salt and light and that is precisely what you are. We don't create the church. The church creates us. God's Word creates us. Death and resurrection creates us. We are salt and light. The same God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has made you the light of the world, has made us a city on a hill. That's our identity. What a privilege! What a calling! What a thrill to live as a creature who reflects a new creation!

Your faith is *the* faith. We don't want to talk about Marge's faith, or Tiffany's faith, or Gerald's faith – we want to talk about *the* faith, the one, holy, catholic [small 'c' which is simply a synonym for universal] and apostolic faith. That is the light that shines in you. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all (Ephesians 4:5). The light is in you. Christ is in you. And His light is irrepressible. It is to be seen. We don't partake of the world's vulgar and profane slop. We are creatures of the light, children of the day (1 Thessalonians 5:5). We love those who don't love us (Luke 6:27). We pray for those who curse us (Luke 6:28). We serve those who don't or won't serve us (Luke 6:33). We are the light of the world. That is our identity. We love our identity. God's grace gave us our identity. Why would we disparage it? Why would we act contrary to it? Are you *afraid* of an insult? Are you *afraid* of an unbeliever's side-eye? Are you *afraid* to be lumped together with the Lord of cross, to suffer the insults that He suffered?

John and Peter knew their identity. A lame man begged for alms at the Beautiful Gate, the renowned entry to the Temple in Jerusalem. Peter had no money to give. But what he had he

gave. “I have no silver or gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!” (Acts 3:6). A firestorm was ignited. The man was healed and wouldn’t shut up about it. Peter boldly proclaims Christ crucified in Solomon’s Portico, very near the Temple, where gobs of people had gathered. Light was shining in Solomon’s Portico and people were drawn to the Light. And the religious rulers were enraged. Peter and John were hauled before the council and they demanded that the apostles stop preaching in Christ’s name. John and Peter knew their identity, they embraced their identity, so how do you suppose they responded? The Light that was in them was shining. They bore witness to who Christ was and the council had no answer. The bogus authorities charged them not to teach “at all in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:18). Do you know why? Because the devil wants the light suppressed. He blinds the minds of unbelievers to keep them in darkness (2 Corinthians 4:4). John and Peter knew their identity. They had been taught: “No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house” (Matthew 5:14). They had been taught: “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill can’t be hidden” (Matthew 5:13). Peter and John knew their identity. They loved their identity. They embraced their identity. This is what they said: “We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard” (Acts 5:20).

Do you know what happens next? They were jailed for this preaching, they were miraculously released from jail by an angel, and the angel told them to back out there and proclaim the gospel (Acts 5:20). They were hauled in front of the council again, with those religious rulers castigating them for speaking the truth. John and Peter knew their identity. They held firm. Those towering apostles held firm. And they were whipped. Forty lashes minus one; they were whipped. As they left do you suppose that they were embittered, depressed, defeated, bemoaning the state of the church, lamenting their unhappy lot? As they left, they rejoiced. Imagine! “Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name” (Acts 5:41). That’s salt and light. That’s the light that shines in you. That is the character which God’s Word crafts in us. That is our identity. There are plenty who want to disparage your identity. You will be tempted to cave, tempted to cower, tempted to capitulate. Deny your Lord... really? Deny who you are... really? What power do they have over us? What power does darkness have over light? (John 1:5). If God is for us... (Romans 8:31).

We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard. That’s what Peter and John said. What did they see and hear? Miracles galore, the glory of the Lord on the Mountain, Jesus risen from the dead. The tomb, His tomb, man’s tomb is empty. God’s kingdom erupts into this fallen world. Christ’s blood is our righteousness. His sacrifice forgives the sins of the penitent. Fallen humanity has been restored to the Father. Heaven is our home. That’s what they had seen and heard. What do *we* see and hear? We hear the gospel proclaimed in all its power. We see the sacrament being celebrated just exactly as our Lord commanded. We see, with the eyes our hearts, the ongoing ministry of the Lord of glory.

Jesus warns about salt losing its flavor, warns about salt losing its taste, warns about salt losing its saltiness. It is an interesting turn of phrase that our Lord uses – what He says is that if salt becomes *foolish*, how shall its saltiness be restored? (Matthew 5:13). How does salt become foolish? By rejecting its identity. “It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet” (Matthew 5:13). It’s Christians who deny their identity who relax

our Lord's commandments and teach others to do the same (Matthew 5:19). It's Christians who deny their identity who behave as though Jesus is still in the tomb and teach others to do the same. It's Christians who deny their identity in Christ who take advantage of others, who refuse to repent of their sin, who put their light under a basket.

We are disciples of Jesus Christ. Our lives are preserved in His sacrifice. He is our salt. Life itself has flavor because we know what living is – we've been created in God's image, death has been slain by the Easter King, and heaven is our home. Love and hope and truth and beauty and humility and grace and sacrifice and purpose flavor our lives because Jesus is the embodiment of all that and more and what He is He gives to us.

This congregation is a city on a hill. The light of Christ shines in this place. You are citizens of Christ's eternal Kingdom. You are that which gives light to the world. Jesus disciples' and Jesus disciples' alone have this identity, this calling. You are highly favored. The earth is cloaked in darkness. The fallen world is evil, corrupt and deficient. The earth needs you, needs people who are salt and light. "Let your light so shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).