

## ***FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY***

***Matthew 5:13-16***

There was a father who was teaching his son what a Christian should be like. He talked about being the salt of the earth and the light of the world and a few other teachings. When the lesson was over, the father realized he had his work cut out for himself, because the little boy asked, "Daddy, have I ever met one of these Christians?" In a very simple way, like that little boy, Jesus challenges us with two very vivid images of what it means to be a Christian. He uses Salt and Light.

First let's look at salt. Salt is something that is so common that we hardly notice it, unless you're on a salt-free or reduced salt diet. We put it on everything from eggs to popcorn. Why?

Because it makes things taste better. That's one of the natural qualities of salt. It is a seasoning that enhances the flavor of food.

It's also a preservative. Before refrigeration or canning, most meat was preserved in one of two ways. It was either dried and smoked, or it was packed in salt and salt cured. Packed in salt, meat would last for years.

Salt also has medicinal qualities. Before the time of modern medicine, salt was used as an antiseptic. It burned like the dickens, but salt was often times poured into an open wound to clean it of any impurities. Sometimes a concoction of salt and vinegar was used for the same purpose, to clean and purify the wound so it would heal quicker and cleaner.

We are called to be the “salt of the earth”. In other words, we're called to be a seasoning that enhances the flavor of life through the living out of our faith. We're called to be preservatives that help preserve the Biblical standards of morality, and we are called to be a curative. We have a message of hope and forgiveness from a Savior that can bring healing to all of the hurts in this world. We know all of these, but there's one more aspect to salt, too.

A group of young people were discussing the text, “You are the salt of the earth”. They came up with the same answers we did: “Salt enhances flavor. Salt preserves from decay. Salt helps heal”. Then a Chinese Christian girl spoke up and said, “Salt creates thirst”. The room suddenly got quiet. Everyone was thinking, “Have I ever made anyone thirsty for Jesus?”

We're called to be the salt of the earth. We're called to season the world with the flavor of Grace. We're called to help preserve the world from decay. We're called to help bring healing. And we're called to make people thirsty for Jesus. Jesus also said, “You are the light of the world”. Most people today don't have a clue what darkness really is. We have street lights and lighted signs, porch lights and decorative lights around the house. Ever since Edison discovered the light bulb, we have been trying to physically push back the darkness. Why? Because light exposes the true nature of things.

Light exposes, but light also reveals. We've all experienced having the lights go out. All of a sudden we're plunged into darkness and the things in the middle of the floor become dangerous. Even the light from a flash of lightning is helpful, for it lets you see where possible dangers lie. It's the same with

life. The light of Christ exposes our need for salvation; it reveals where the dangers are, and it reveals where safety, direction, and new life can be found.

Jesus calls us and challenges us to be light in the world today.

He calls us, not only to be light, but to point to the ultimate source of light, Himself.

So what are the implications of all this for us today? There was a mother mouse who decided to teach her children about the world. So she gathered all of her little mice and set out for a walk. Suddenly, they found themselves in front of the family cat, dozing in the sunlight. The mother mouse was scared. Just as she was about to get past the cat, the cat's eyes popped open and it raised its paw. Well, just as the cat's paw started to come down, that mother mouse looked the cat right in the eye, and started barking like a dog. The cat was so startled and frightened, that it jumped up and ran away! The mother mouse, wiped her brow, shook a little, and then turned to her little mice and said, "Children, I hope you learned a valuable lesson.

Sometimes it's good to know a second language!"

It's the same way with us. It's good to know a second language. Salt and light are the language of God; the language of Grace; the language of hope and love. And when this language is translated into action, it becomes the most beautiful language ever spoken. We're called to be salt and light, and to speak the language of God as we live our faith. We're called to live the Word.

Three students were discussing various versions of the Bible.

One said, "I like the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. It is easier to read than the older versions". A second student said, "I like the Jerusalem Bible. It's easy to read, and

it's poetic in its style. I can use it in my daily prayer". The third student surprised them all and said, "I like my mom's version the best. She translates the Bible into action that I can use in my daily life".

That's what we're called to do. We're called to be salt and light and translate the Word of God into action so others can see and taste how good God is through Christ Jesus.

We might be tempted to call this portion of the sermon the charge of the light brigade, or the call to pass the salt and be salt shakers in the world. We know the challenge. And sometimes it's hard. But today we come, not just to see and to hear, today we come to taste and see that the Lord is good. When we gather to celebrate the Eucharist, we come to feast at the banquet table of our Lord and to be filled with the bread of life. This bread will fill us and empower us to be salt and light for the world, so that when someone describes a Christian, no one will ask us, "Have I ever seen one?"

**AMEN.**