

## Sermon for February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2014

### Fifth Sunday after Epiphany, Matthew 5:13-20

BLESSINGS TO YOU AND PEACE FROM GOD THE FATHER, OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Our eyes are a most incredible blessing from God. Through the gift of these **eyes** of ours we can **perceive** the difference between light and dark, we can see all the colors of the rainbow, we can see shadows, see the beauty of the world, read signs, and do so many more things which are **too** numerous to count. Did you know, that given the **ideal conditions** our eyes can see a candle burning for up to **3½ miles** away?

I saw a story on television the other day about the Mars rover Curiosity. It had taken a picture of the earth. At twilight our earth was the **brightest point of light** in the sky. Mars is 100 million miles away from us and the story said that, (quote) *“A human observer with normal vision, if standing on Mars, could easily see the earth and the moon as two distinct bright, ‘evening stars’.”* (end quote) How **miraculous** are these eyes of ours.

Maybe you did **not** know this, but there was a time in this world when our street lights did **not come on** automatically. The street lamps burned kerosene, gasoline, or candles. They had to be lit by a **lamplighter** each night. When novelist, Robert Louis Stevenson was a boy, he watched a lamplighter **igniting**

lamp down his street. Stevenson **said** to his nanny, “*I am watching him put holes in the darkness.*” “*Watching him put holes in the darkness*” is **one** way to describe how we see **light** being brought into the **darkness** of the world.

Our **gospel** reading for this morning comes as part of what is called Jesus’ **Sermon on the Mount**. (*If you would like to read more of this sermon it covers chapters 5 thru 7 of Matthew’s gospel.*) The sermon came at a time when Jesus had **just begun** his ministry. He was **teaching** in the synagogues, **preaching** the good news of the kingdom of God, and **healing** every disease and sickness among the people. The news about him spread like wildfire. People were coming from **everywhere** to follow him. This sermon was an opportunity for Jesus to **instruct** his young disciples.

This morning we read a **continuation** of Jesus’ teaching where he told the disciples two short parables which would have given them a sense of mission and a way to live their lives. He said, “*You are the salt of the earth—you are the light of the world.*” For the disciples during their time in history knowing the **value** of salt and light would have been something they would have been well acquainted with.

The **traditional use** of these terms were symbols for the **Law and God’s covenant**.

They would have **also** known that in the Old Testament there had been **many** references to salt. In and of itself salt is not an element which is useful

alone. Its value comes in its application with other things. It was used as a purifier for sacrifices, having **no salt** meant that food would have been unappetizing, if there were **no salt** the food would have spoiled or been polluted, as salt **had to be used** as a preservative. At that time it was **also commonly known** that salt could lose its saltiness over the years through being **exposed to moisture** to the point where it no longer had any use it was literally, *'no longer good for anything'* and could not be restored so it would be deemed **unusable** except for building roads.

As for being *'the light of the world'* this might have been a bit more difficult for the disciples to understand; although, the **peasant houses** of that time were generally a **one room** house near other one room houses built in a “U” shape. All who would enter the one room house thru a courtyard would **see the lamp stand** as the lamp would give light to all the rooms. The **only** way to extinguish the lamp was to put the bushel basket over it. Thereby no one would have any light. All would be in darkness for it is written, *“like the blind we grope along the wall, feeling our way like men without eyes. At midday we stumble as if it were twilight.”*

This is where our **modern day life** and the **lives of the disciples** 2,000 years ago **intersect** in these two parables. We are called not only **to be salt, to be upstanding** people of the earth, and **to be the light** of the world but this is why we disciples of Jesus are called to do them—Jesus said, 'DO THESE THINGS

BEFORE OTHERS SO THAT THEY MAY SEE YOUR GOOD WORKS AND GIVE GLORY TO YOUR FATHER IN HEAVEN. It is all **about what we** do for God.

**None** of this is about us. What we do in this world is all for God's glory.

Salt's value **comes in application** with other things. Salt **preserves**, salt **heals**, salt gives **flavor** and **makes things better**. That is what our **mission is** and what we are **called to do**. **To help** others, **to be there** for people when they are in need, **to guide them** when times are tough, **to help ease** their pain and suffering.

As for being a **light** in the world—I have this little card in my office. It says, 'A candle loses nothing by lighting another candle.' It is **so** true—we lose **nothing** by being a light for someone else. There is so much darkness and suffering in the world today. This week Phillip Seymour Hoffman tragically died from an **addiction** that ended up **consuming** his life. Just look around at the people who are **suffering** right here in Riverside. There are people in our **own** congregation who have suffered with addictions, unhealthy habits, or over indulging—**me** included. **None of us** are beyond over doing it now and then. But we Christians are called by God to be a **light** in the darkness for those who **need** our help. We all have the light and the Spirit of God inside us. We are to **shine** before others so that they may see our **good works** and **give glory** to our Father in heaven.

It is **all** about God and God's glory in this world. It is **not** about us. God has given us incredible eyes to see and a Spirit in our hearts to **shine out** and be a **blessing** in the world. Open the eyes of our hearts that we may **see God** in the world. Open our eyes to see those people who are in times of need. Open the eyes of our hearts to **help** those people who may not yet know God. To know the **love** and **mercy** He has for them. Let our **light** shine so all who have eyes can see the good works God has **begun** in us. **YOU** are the **salt** of the earth. **YOU** are the **light** of the world. Be who you already have been called to be, by the **power** of God, to **put holes in the darkness** in our world. All **thanks** be to God. **AMEN.**