

**Matthew 5:13-20 – Salt, Light, and Doers of Good Works**

We have heard these words of Jesus over and over again and yet, they tend more to be admired than believed, honored but not taken all that seriously in our daily lives. Perhaps because we tend to see these words as proscriptive—this is what you must become. But these are not words of law demanding something from us. They are Gospel words, of God's gracious declaration. The prodding of our Savior is not to make ourselves salt, light or doers of good works but let Him work in us, among us, and through us.

We do not make ourselves the salt of the earth. God does. We do not make ourselves the light of the world. God's light shines through us. We do not force ourselves to do good works but God works in us and through the good that is His grace, His will, and His purpose. The keys to this passage are found in the verbs. You are ... not you will be or you could be or you should be ... and let your light shine ... so that your good works may be seen...

You are salt. This is the judgment of grace. God does not survey our character and find this in us. Christ dwells within us by baptism and faith. We are His and He lives in us and works through us. God does not declare us salt because of our wisdom, strength, or stature. Even though we are weak and foolish and lowly, we are the salt of the earth—God declares this!

What goes with this declaration is the call to faithfulness. Do not lose this grace. How do you stay salty? By being close to Christ, close to His Word and Sacraments. You abide in Christ and He will abide in you and He will work through you to flavor the world with this grace and to preserve the world from destruction and condemnation with the power of this grace. If we stay close to the source, we will always be the salt God has declared us to be.

Our Lord does not command us to be light. He declares us His light. This light was placed in you in baptism and you wear it by faith. You are light because Christ who is the Light of the World dwells in you. You do not make yourself to be light by exemplary moral behavior or keen Biblical insight. God has declared you to be light in Christ. Don't get in the way of Christ's light. You cannot make yourself His light but you can distract from this light and hide its brightness. When the focus is on you instead of upon Christ, you diminish the brightness of His light.

You are salt and you are light in Christ, because of Christ, so remain close to Christ so that you may remain salty and His light will shine through you. That is the call of Christ. Abide in Him and He will abide in you. This is not merely for your own benefit but so that Your heavenly Father may see your good works and those good works may glorify Him. The reflection of our light flows not back to us so that we might be in its limelight but rather to the Lord. The light comes from Him and it shines back to Him through us.

Your good works are not the fruit of your own work, but Christ living and working in and through you. The good works that we are called to do are not works that show forth our own righteousness but reflections of the righteousness of Christ that clothed us in our baptism. His perfect holiness has become our clothing in baptism and the good works that we show are His holiness and righteousness spilling out and showing forth in us. This is no demand of the law to be holy but the God who has made us holy in Christ now calling us to let His holiness and righteousness shine through us.

St. Paul echoes Jesus' call when he says: **"we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works."** This is who we are and this is what we do—we are God's new people in Christ and Christ works in and through us. The good works we do are not ours to boast about but Christ working in us and through us. St. Paul put this in focus when he said, it is not me but Christ in me. I died. I have been crucified with Christ so that it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. And the life I live is Christ's life and the works I do are Christ's works ... or Christ has died for nothing at all.

**A recent and best-selling “Christian” book is called “A purpose driven life.” That book became popular because we all want to do something, to accomplish something, and to be something. We think this is the reason God has redeemed us—so that we might accomplish something. If you read that book you will find a lot of Bible passages, but Christ is not the center of that book, you and I are the center. From this book you would learn all about how to live a full life for yourself and find purpose for yourself, but you will find nothing about how Christ is to live in you. Therefore, it misses the mark. The truth of the Scripture is that Christ is our life. You are not your own. You were bought with a price. Christ is in you.**

**This text is no pep talk to get people to stop doing bad things and to start doing good things. These words of Jesus are a call to let His light shine in you and through you, to remain close to Jesus where His Word and Sacraments are so that He may live in you and work through you. These words of Jesus are a stark reminder that apart from Him we can do nothing. But Christ can do all things and if we are to accomplish anything it will be because Christ works in us and through us. You are salt, you are light, and you are doers of good works—you didn’t make yourself these things. God has declared you such and given you His promise that He will work in and through you. So let Him. Let Him do what He will do; stick close to the Word and Sacraments so that His abiding presence rests in you and His works can be through you.**