

Ps 112; Is 58:6-12; 1 Cor 2:1-16; Mt 5:13-20
02-05-17 – Service of Holy Communion
Shining Light in the Darkness

Once in a while, I have the honor and privilege of blessing a home. Depending on the beliefs of the family, I have been asked to anoint windows and doors with oil – or simply pray – but, if the new owners have no specific requests, I bring two gifts: a box of salt and a candle. I offer salt and light as I pray a blessing over the whole house and its inhabitants. These are uniquely Christian gifts – for disciples of the Lord Jesus. I come to claim the place and the family – and the whole area for the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Years ago, in Albuquerque, a young Greek Orthodox couple came to me to ask me to exorcize their apartment. I believe this is the most unusual request I have had in my ministry years. I agreed, of course. The wife was especially eager to forbid ugly nasties any entry into her home. I anointed each door and window frame of the small apartment with oil – and prayed with the couple. The prayer of blessing is effective against darkness. Some things cannot

be blessed, but it is amazing what can be blessed and set aside for the sake of Christ's kingdom. God is faithful in big things and little things. You are called to dispel darkness by stepping in and bringing the Light of Christ with you.

Church folks sometimes get stuck in conventional interpretations. Faith in Jesus has shaped lives over thousands of years. Faith emerges in forms we have never seen before. Millennial people seek expressions of discipleship that their parents and grandparents didn't need back in the day – or as my granddaughter says, “in the olden days.”

Jesus continues to call us this week in our Gospel passage. Those who are awake to the Scripture will notice that we begin today where we left off last week. Jesus is speaking on the mountainside. He has essentially rewritten or restated the Ten Commandments in the first twelve verses of the chapter. Now, He strengthens His calling upon those who claim to follow Him.

He says you are the salt of the earth. He meant it then, and He means it now. The presence and flavor of salt are unmistakable. There's nothing

else like it. Salt heightens the flavor of food. Think of a boiled potato or a hard-cooked egg. Needs something. Needs salt. And Jesus warns you and me – don't lose your saltiness. Be sure you add zing – remember to be that preserving agent in relationships – and don't be shy about calling out the warning against sin. Salt brings cleansing. You are the salt of the earth, but salt that has lost its saltiness will be thrown out, says the Lord. A strong warning in the last days.

Then, Jesus says something remarkable. He says you are the light of the world. Here I thought He was the Light of the World. What you saints bring into the world is the Light of Jesus that dwells inside you. The Apostle John records Jesus saying, "I am the light of the world. The one who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." (Jn 8:12) The Lord gives a warning along with His naming of the disciple's character trait: Keep the Light of Jesus shining brightly. Do not cover it – do not hide it. This is to bring glory to God, not yourself.

Jesus calls you and me out to bring salt and light – and to be these things – to show forth these

qualities 24/7 – every day of the year. You might be asking, “Preacher, does this mean I belong to Jesus, not myself?” – what do you believe about that?

The Lord Jesus began this conversation by giving us these seemingly impossible Beatitudes – or marks of the holy life – the blessed way of being. Remember, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” -- All the way through to “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

If you look at the rulers of the land in Jesus’ time, you see that order was maintained by military threat. There was a Roman legion in every outpost of the Empire. They kept the Pax Romana – the law of force. And so it was in the City of Corinth. We look in on the Apostle Paul as he writes to the church at Corinth about their power struggles inside the church. They look a lot like the society around them. They are behaving like privileged, overindulged children. They have broken into factions around the leaders of the congregation: party of Apollos,

Party of Peter, party of Paul or party of Christ. They believe that intellectual knowledge leads to salvation – or that philosophical wisdom leads to understanding God. But, Paul cuts through this competitive, arguing by declaring the truth of Jesus Christ is revealed to believers through the Holy Spirit. We are not led by wise and understanding human governors, but by the Spirit of God.

It is just as difficult for the human heart and mind in our time of history – this information age – to release the arrogant, grasping ways of human rule – to bow low before God and believe Him for the covenant promises fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth.

What the first disciples, and the fractured Corinthian fellowship and we must face is the darkness inside the human heart before the light of Christ enters. Isaiah saw it back in the 6th c. BC – he says, “remove the yoke of bondage, stop pointing the accusing finger, quit shouting about the evil in others.” Instead, work for good – for those who are excluded, pushed to the side, exiled to the margins of the community.

Once you and I confront our own dark motives and tendencies, we are ready to allow Jesus to come into our hearts and cleanse and dedicate and sanctify that house – this tent in which we dwell for now.

The law Jesus has stated fulfills every commandment that God has put in place. This blessedness He names is His own righteousness that enters us through faith in Him and the work He has already accomplished. Through your obedience to His Word, darkness gives way to His presence on the inside. Christ in you, the hope of glory. (Col 1:27) A shining light in the darkness. Amen.