

**“Salt and Light”**  
**Feb. 5, 2017 – 5<sup>th</sup> of Ordinary**

**Isaiah 58:1-9a (9b-12)**

58:1 Shout out, do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet! Announce to my people their rebellion, to the house of Jacob their sins. 58:2 Yet day after day they seek me and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments, they delight to draw near to God. 58:3 "Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?" Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers. 58:4 Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high. 58:5 Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? 58:6 Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? 58:7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? 58:8 Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. 58:9a Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.

## **1 Corinthians 2:1-16**

When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.

Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him"— these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual. Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny. "For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

### **Matthew 5:13-20**

5:13 "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. 5:14 "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. 5:15 No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. 5:16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. 5:17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. 5:18 For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. 5:19 Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 5:20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

Today, Matthew gives us section two of Jesus' sermon from the mountainside. It goes without saying that Jesus had a lot to say to these people gathered there. He's got a lot to say to us. Since the time of his baptism and temptation Jesus has been hard at it. He's been on the campaign trail and he's not running for office. He doesn't care much about popularity. He's recruiting for the kingdom of God. Matthew tells it this way, "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan." When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him.

If there had been any social media beyond word of mouth the crowd gathered there at the foot of the mountain would have been in the tens of thousands. If the local and national news picked up his story, it would have looked like the stadium on Super Bowl Sunday. People would have gathered from all over the world and they'd have watched the highlights of Jesus doing what Jesus does on t.v. Commentators would have droned on and on with great expectation of just what he would say and do today. They'd have talked about his unique gifts and his ability to help and heal

easily eluding the defenses of the opposition. People would remember the day of this sermon on the mountain and would talk about it for – well, for more than two thousand years. Like we are today.

And we preachers are still commentating. We're still amazed at the following Jesus still has when the truth about Jesus is that he didn't say what he thinks people want to hear – he says what they need to hear. Not once did he say, 'follow me and we'll hoist the trophy,' Jesus was all about those beatitudes that set the tone for his ministry. Jesus is all about those who are less becoming more, those who are marginalized moving to the middle, those who are poor finding wealth in terms the world simply can't understand, and those who have more than enough learning that with what they have comes great responsibility. It's what Paul means when he tells the Corinthians, "And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual. Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny. "For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ. The sermon on the mount is all about Jesus, giving us, a piece of his mind. So, on to part 2 of his sermon.

Here, from the mountainside Jesus says to us, You are the salt and you are light. He didn't, as most preachers would and as this one has done in the past, spend a lot of time talking about the nature of salt and light. We need salt and we need light. If salt is no good, toss it. If you hide a light it does no good. Jesus knows that everyone in his hearing knows how important salt and light are. Note that he doesn't say you should do your best to be salt – you should really try hard to be light. Jesus says, you ARE salt – you are light. You are essential to the well being of everyone around you. No, really, he says, "I'm serious now – this is who you are and what you are supposed to be doing." Here's Jesus in his purest form telling us exactly what he wants us to know and to hear. Here he is laying down the law, his law. We all know what we've done with that law. The law of Jesus. We all know what we've done with 'love God and love one another. We've cliched it and watered it down and talked about and discussed what Jesus really meant and sure he didn't mean all of one another. But, this morning standing before us he once again declares you **are** the light of the world and you **are** the salt of the earth.

Somehow over time we've managed to do like they've done to the Super Bowl. 51 years ago when those of us who were living gathered around the t.v. for the game it was about the game. Now with two weeks of build up and a night that includes a hollywood red carpet event and hundreds of hours of yammering coverage someone says, 'oh by the way, there's a game being played **but** make sure you go to the kitchen when Atlanta has the ball so you can get back to your

seat in time to see the 5.5 million dollar ad for who knows what. There's a game in there somewhere. And in all the words we spin, in all the suppositions we weave, in all the rationalizing we do – Jesus is still here and Jesus message is still here – somewhere.

Long before Jesus came Isaiah was telling God's people much the same thing. He was telling them that they were essential to one another, to those in need, to a world in darkness, to a world in pain. Listen for the salt and light as he says, "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly."

Being sought and light means we share our bread with the hungry like the Souper Bowl of Caring has been doing since 1990. Over a hundred million dollars, mostly one at a time for local food concerns. And every dollar, every can of soup goes to local need. Sharing bread is ACS and Micah's Backpack and so much more. Being salt and light means bringing the homeless poor right here into our home, our church house, with Family Promise. It means being dedicated to the cause of securing housing for all. Being salt and light means covering the newborn naked baby in clothing from our Baby Shower, it bins barrels of clothes going to Haiti to cover young children in a VBS and t-shirt and love.

Being Salt and light means not making excuses about the enormity of problems. It means being what Jesus, remember Jesus, saying that we **are**.

Our light – our healing salt – God made us to be like Christ for each other. Each other here in this room and each other out there. Each other where it's easy and safe and each other where it's controversial and difficult. Being Salt and Light means we listen to Jesus first. Being salt and light means being like Jesus. Not a Jesus wannabe. We are called to bring flavor, healing, wholeness to a world whose salt has lost the essential quality of being life sustaining. We need to be salt. We are called to bring light into any corner of the darkness of the world around us...near or far. We are the light of the world...we should walk in the light...strutting our stuff...

We come to the table and meet Christ here. Jesus chose the grain of the field and the fruit of the vine to represent himself broken and poured out for us. We can see and taste the light of Christ bursting forth, flavor filled, life giving in these most essential elements of our faith. In the healing wholeness of the body and the blood we find the salt of forgiveness crusting over and over and over again the deep and open wounds of our sinfulness until finally in Christ we, too, find resurrection, pure and whole and unblemished. We find the light in consuming the presence of Christ who illuminates our way. We find the robust flavor of God's love broken and poured out for us, to nourish us with essential things, to nurture us in God's great love. Faith, hope, love, service, sacrament – the very grace of God.