

EPIPHANY 5
ISAIAH 58:1-12
1 CORINTHIANS 2:1-16
MATTHEW 5:13-20
FEBRUARY 4, 5, 2017

YEAR A

You and I are set apart by God through the power of the Holy Spirit. We are set apart by the blood of the Lamb to be the children of God. As we live in this relationship with God we come to know what is involved in this relationship. We call God our Father and Jesus the Son of God. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit and we are claimed by God as God's own. As we read our Bible readings today we see that God has an expectation for those that are claimed as Children of God. Isaiah 58 begins with a direction that says we are to shout out the message like a trumpet blast. We worship the Lord and we bear witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 2 teaches that we proclaim Christ crucified and risen from the dead. We teach and preach a message that contained the wisdom of the Lord.

Our relationship with the Lord has its beginning in God's grace and it comes through faith and obedience to the will of God. In our lesson from Matthew 5 Jesus gives us more insight into this relationship. Our Lord gave instruction to the disciples and now to us about allowing this relationship to grow. It is interesting that at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus was talking only to his closest disciples. It could be there were only a few with him as he started to teach. By the end of the Sermon on the Mount in chapter 7 there is a crowd listening to the teaching.

Matthew 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.**

Jesus talked about salt. He tells the disciples about the nature of the Lord's teaching. He tells them that the word of God is a word that attracts others to the message. They were to be salt of the earth. Jesus does not say that they

would become salt but they were salt. Salt by itself does not do much. Many of us use salt and pepper whenever we eat. We might salt our food even before we taste it because we think salt makes everything better. Salt when it stays in the shaker does not do much good. It might look good sitting next to the peppershaker but the purpose of salt is to make food taste better.

You and I are called to be salt of the earth. God blesses us with gifts that come to us by way of the Holy Spirit. When we install congregational leaders into various ministries in the church we recognize that the gifts come through the Holy Spirit. We know that a successful ministry allows God to be made known to us through the Holy Spirit. It teaches that Jesus came to live, die and rise again that we would have life. During those installation services we ask that those individuals would remain faithful to the teachings of the church. We asked them to read the Bible for direction. We ask them to be constant in prayer and to use the disciplines that help them grow closer to God. We ask them to remain obedient to the will of God. Since you and I are salt we are to make things taste better. We reach out to those in need sharing the God's love. We bear witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The same is true of light. Jesus tells his disciples that no one lights a lamp only to put a lid on it. When our acolytes light candles at the beginning of the service they want us to remember that our fire is burning and that our light shines for all to see. They want to see and remember that Jesus is present among us. At the end of the service they put the bowl part of the candle lighting stick over the flame and it is extinguished. Jesus says that we do not light a light and then put a bowl over it because our light will go out and no one will see the light of the world through us.

When our Lord told his disciples that they were salt and light he meant that they were to share his message of salvation. In the beginning the disciples were a bit timid about this message. They followed Jesus but they had so much to

learn about being salt and light. They needed to remember that their ministry was not of their own making. The ministry was not something they dreamed up or something they could complete themselves. They were to build up the church. Their words and actions were to lift the name of Jesus. They were to hear the word of the Lord and respond in faith.

Matthew 5:15, 16 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. 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.

We use our God given talents so that the church of Jesus Christ is enriched. It takes all of God's people coming together using the variety of gifts. When we use those gifts together as God intends the light shines and the salt provides flavor. When we are obedient in using our salt and light others will come to know what you and I know. We know the gospel of Jesus Christ. We know that life comes through the love of God. We claim the gifts of life and we know they come by grace through faith. Some of you have the ability to measure a piece of lumber and then actually cut along the line. Others have the gift of music and they use those gifts to proclaim the message of the gospel through song. Some have the gift of proclamation and others the gift of teaching. We use those gifts as salt and light.

When we use God's gifts selfishly the church cannot benefit from our gifts. It would do you no good if I go into the closet and preach to the walls. It does the church no good if our worship-planning group does not use their gifts for the good of the church. If our musicians see this as a performance it stops being a ministry. We have many fine singers and other musicians in our congregation but if they do not remember that Jesus is Lord our witness is not effective.

Matthew 5:19, 20 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. For I tell you, unless your

righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus is very clear about this ministry and about the church being salt and light. The message of our Lord is a powerful message. It is a message that people want to hear. It is a message that does what it sets out to do. When Jesus came to earth his purpose was to bring all people to himself. God is known through the Son and is understood because of the Holy Spirit. When we are faithful in being salt and light others will want to come and know the Lord. They will want to see why we are so excited. Are you excited to be salt and light? Are you on fire for the Lord? If you are excited and others see your excitement they will want to share in the excitement. If we get excited about the Lord and the message of the gospel others will want to come and see what we are doing. They will want to know the source of our excitement.

Jesus preached and he taught. The more he ministered to people the more the crowds were. Jesus taught with authority. He is the Light of the World. You have that same authority. Use your salt and light and serve the Lord. AMEN