

“Boost up your saltiness!” Matthew 5:13-20

“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet. “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, 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 who is in heaven.”

This morning we will continue to enjoy the most famous address ever – Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. The last week we reflected on what it means to be blessed. What the blessings, that Jesus highlights as the most important, are. And today we will meditate upon the salt of the earth and the light of the world passage.

These things Jesus said right after the beatitudes and they are closely connected. With beatitudes Jesus opens His sermon. With beatitudes Jesus really encourages us, we could almost say that He cheers us up. He reminds us of how blessed we are.

For He assures us that our experiences of being poor in spirit, that is – depending and trusting in the Triune God, instead of trusting in ourselves, and of mourning and thirsting for righteousness, – when we begin to realize how seriously damaged by sin we are, and when we begin to worry about all the injustices of this world, – that these are nothing else but normal experiences for Christians.

The presence of the Triune God with us has changed us. We are now a new creation, you are a new creation, and we experience this world differently, and often the reality of this age just breaks our hearts.

And then Jesus goes on assuring us that as we respond to His call, as we try to follow Him, to listen to Him, to learn from Him, as the Holy Spirit fills us and changes our hearts, wonderful things happen without us even noticing them.

God’s mercy transforms us and makes us merciful. God’s grace and forgiveness, so readily available to us, purify us and make our hearts pure. God’s peace that surpasses all our understanding fills us and through us begins to flow to others in this world making us peacemakers. This is what our God does for you.

All of this is happening as we are reshaped in the Image and likeness of Jesus. And don’t forget about the possible rejections, ridicule and even persecutions which may come upon us as we try to live out our Christian identity. Those all are good reminders that we are on the right track and in the great company of God’s saints.

Then Jesus goes on exhorting us to live as who we are, – as children of God the Father and as His disciples. More, Jesus actually gives us the reason why we need to do that. Remember? “So that people may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

Okay, we will need to unpack this so that we are clear about what exactly Jesus is saying. Jesus uses these two images, of the salt and of the light. Remember that these words were spoken in that time, when electrical lights didn't exist. When the night came, it could be pitch black. In such circumstances a city set on a hill would be seen from miles and miles away.

It would serve as a beacon so that people who traveled in such dark night could know where the place of safety, of rest and of everything needed is. The point that Jesus is making is that such a city can not be hidden. It is not possible.

If only it exists, it will be sheading its light far, far away into darkness and thus showing the way to the people who otherwise would be lost. You are the light of the world. A Christian is a person who shines the light of the Trine God.

The light of the Gospel, the light of God's grace, the light of God's forgiveness and mercy, the light of God's holiness, the light of God's wisdom in this dark world. So that people who live in darkness could see this light.

If you are a Christian, if you are a child of your heavenly Father, if you are a disciple of Jesus, it is impossible for you not to shine this light, similarly as it is impossible for a city on a hill to be hidden.

The other illustration with the salt is even more helpful to drive this point home. Salt is that salty mineral. If it really is salt then it is salty. It can't lose its saltiness and still continue to be salt. If it is not salty, it is not salt.

Or as Jesus said, if salt has lost its saltiness, it is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. "You are the salt of the earth". If we lose our saltiness, if we don't live and act as children of God and Jesus' disciples... we are no longer good for anything.

Let's go back to the reason why we need to be salty, and why we need to let our light shine before others. "So that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." Good works...

I suspect that sometimes we as Lutherans may have rather unhealthy reaction hearing the phrase "good works". For we are taught again and again that we are saved by... yes, by grace alone, through faith alone, and not by our good works.

Amen to that. We are indeed saved by God's grace alone and we receive the gift of forgiveness and eternal life by faith alone. So far so good. But then same take and misuse this wonderful gift of God, saying that as long as they believe that they are saved by faith alone, that's enough for them. Nothing more should be expected.

Really?! Perhaps they should listen to Jesus. Perhaps they need to read the Scripture. Perhaps they need to wake up and realize that this foolish excuse will not save them

on the Last Day. Dr Luther put it nicely: “We are indeed saved by faith alone, but... the saving faith is never alone.” What then accompanies it? Yes, our works of love, our good works! James speaks about it in his letter explaining that you can’t say that you have faith, but then not to do good works. It means your faith is dead.

Paul writes to Ephesians that we are saved by grace alone, so that no one would boast, but then he writes in the very next sentence the purpose of why we are saved. We are a new creation in Jesus Christ, “created for good works [!], which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

And now Jesus says the same thing. Yes, you are blessed for you are made children of God and heirs of God’s Kingdom, and if you indeed are one of God’s people, you will do good works. There is no room for dead and inactive faith.

Good works are not optional. We are created to do them. To be the light to this world. So that people would see our good works and give glory to our Father who is in heaven. Now, wait! – think about this, – Jesus says that they will see our good works and will give glory to our Father who is in heaven.

Why would someone give glory to God our Father simply seeing that we do something good? Many people do good things. Does it mean that people give glory to God the Father every time when they see someone doing good? Not at all.

Often it is used in the very opposite way. “See, those people who are not Christians do more good works than you, Christians”. Such things are often said to illustrate that we don’t need to be Christians to be good. So, why would someone give glory to our Father seeing that we do good works?

There is only one explanation. If we have declared who we are. That we are disciples of Jesus Christ, that we are children of God the Father, that this is our core identity, and that this new identity is what guides and shapes our lives.

That we do what we do because of what the Triune God has done for us. That we do what we do so that others could see in our lives the grace and goodness of our God and therefore give glory to Him, not to us. Thus all credit goes to our Father.

That our motivation is not to be good and to receive praise from people, but to give glory to our Father who is in heaven. You see, it is not our good works alone, that will make someone praise our Father, our good works should always come together with our good and bold confession of our Christian faith.

We believe, we trust in the Triune God and therefore we act. Thanks be to God!

Finally, we need to answer one more question. What are those good works? How do we know what to do? You know the answer. The 10 Commandments tell us which works can truly be called good works. These are the ones for which we are created.

And again, they begin with the first three commandments. Our most important good works are done in relationships with the Triune God. When our highest allegiance, our deepest commitment, all our trust is placed in the Triune God, when we live to please and honor Him.

When we run to Him in all trouble and when we give thanks to Him for all the gifts and blessings. When we gladly listen to what He speaks to us, and are nourished by the heavenly food that He provides. Where does this all happen?

That's right. Here, in the Divine Service. This is where we keep the first three commandments. This is our good work. It gives glory to God the Father and it prepares and equips us for all the other good works.

When we honor authorities, in state and family, at workplace and school, in the Church. When we care for the life and well-being of all people in our lives. When we appreciate and cherish the gift of marriage and family and lead chaste lives.

When we are good and faithful stewards of all the material gifts entrusted to us. When we care for the reputation of others and when we try to lead simple, grateful and joy-filled lives. When we do all of this not according to our own ideas, or according to the latest trends in society, but – guided by our God and Father.

When we do this, and when we confess and explain that the reason why we worship, are respectful and caring, value marriage and the gift of sexuality, are generous with our possession and gracious with our words – that the reason is our gratitude to our God, then we truly give glory to Him and others will do the same.

If we are not faithful in our worship, if we don't pray for friends and enemies alike, don't listen to the teachings of our Lord and are ignorant about what the Bible reveals, are disrespectful, negligent to care for others, live as drunkards and adulterers, are stingy with our money, if we take delight in gossiping and give in to the temptation of this world... and still claim to be Christians... then it is because of us that the name of the Lord is blasphemed among the Gentiles.

So, I pray today that the Holy Spirit would keep us reminding how blessed we are, how great the gifts of our God are, which He has bestowed upon us, – our new identity, members of God's own family and heirs of God's Kingdom. Christians.

I pray that this assurance by Jesus would inspire all of us to live out our new identity as fully as possible, with joyful commitment, to boost up our saltiness so that our light would shine in the darkness and so that our many good works would lead many people to give glory to our Father who is in heaven.

For the Kingdom, the power and the glory are His. Forever and ever.

Amen.