

**Sermon Notes – February 5, 2023**  
**The Holy Gospel of St. Matthew 5: 13-20**  
**Peace Lutheran Church**  
**“To Be Salt and Light”**

“Your light shall break forth like the dawn” (Isa. 58: 8). The words of the prophet speak to the cosmic rhythms in the northern hemisphere on this day, as the light of dawn rises to scatter the dark of night a littler earlier each day. They are words that aptly describe the season after Epiphany, as we continue to bask in the radiance of the true Light revealed to us at Christmas. The light still shines in the darkness, a light to the nations bringing life to all people.

In the gospel reading this day Jesus is hard at work illuminating what life in his radiant kingdom looks like. Only moments after delivering memorable statements of blessing from a mountaintop to an eager crowd, He borrows Isaiah’s metaphor and adds one of His own: salt and light. The blessings of the beatitudes overflow into today’s verses: “You are the salt of the earth...you are the light of the world” (Matt. 5: 13-14). Notice that Jesus’ statements are descriptive; He articulates what the people gathered already are, not what they might be (or could be or should be, if only they did “x”), Jesus tells us what we are before getting into the expectations.

Salt and light. Salt, like water, is necessary for light. Light accompanies God’s acts of salvation throughout scripture, beginning with the first words spoken at creation. Being salt and light flows into a life described by the prophet Isaiah (and Matthew, as we discover in chapter 25): a life fiercely committed to loosing the bonds of injustice” Isa. 58: 6) and satisfying the needs of others. A salt-rich life is one defined by enriching others. To let one’s light shine is to continually seek deliverance for the oppressed.

Jesus’ statements in the excerpt from Matthew can seldom be heard without making an immediate connection to the words spoken at baptism as a candle is handed to the family of the baptized: “Let your light so shine before others... With each time, as we gather around this ancient ritual, Jesus passes the light to yet another disciple. And with it comes the Spirit of Wisdom-God’s

wisdom, as Paul explains to the congregation at Corinth. In the waters of baptism, we are graciously bestowed wisdom that illuminates Jesus Christ and Him crucified - foolishness to the world, but powerfully transformative to those who receive it. If Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is any indication, this enlightenment is not only for some, but is a gift offered to the whole earth.

The gospel - the mystery of God - bursts forth from one reading to the next. Blessed and sent as salt and light, we become "like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail"; we are called "restorer[s] of streets to live in" (Isa. 58: 11, 12), and our hearts are made steady. Perhaps the greatest mystery of all is that it is Jesus, not us, who gives us our saltiness and our luminescence. This is good news for hearers who feel the burden of never being enough. So let your light shine. May it break forth like the dawn.