

A wooden cross is visible in the upper left corner, set against a blue background with a white rectangular area containing text. The cross is made of light-colored wood and is partially obscured by the white box.

SERMON: “We Would See Jesus”

Isaiah 58:1-9; Psalm 112:1-9; 1 Corinthians 2:1-12 (13-16);

FOCAL: Matthew 5:13-20

In our scripture readings this morning emerges a theme.

A call to righteousness and a call to shine God's light

Isaiah calls for a fast of righteousness; loosing the bonds of injustice and braking the yoke of the oppressed.

The Psalmist proclaims that the righteous shall never be moved and that for their righteousness in God they will be remembered for ever, and they will be a light for the upright.

In our 1 Corinthians passage, Paul recalls his arrival in Corinth: “I didn’t come preaching God’s secrets to you like i was an expert in speech or wisdom” Paul says and goes on to remark “I had made up my mind not to think about anything else while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and to preach him as crucified.”

Paul clarifies this as he begins to recognize his failures in Athens, where he and others serving “The Way” or the church that was emerging that would become what most Christians and Christ followers would recognize as “The Body of Christ” left in the world to make a difference for the kingdom of Heaven.

Paul writes in 1 Cor. 1:22-23, “Jews ask for signs, and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, which is a scandal to the Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” that somehow the same Paul who had proclaimed he could become what was needed for the preaching of the gospel.

Paul had for the first time in his ministry faced the real challenge that his work for the kingdom in Athens didn't turn out as he imagined it would.

Paul tried to present for the Jews, signs of Christ's presence, while the Greeks wanted earthly wisdom as they had seen from men like Plato and Aristotle.

Paul is different. His ministry reflects the school of hard knocks he has just emerged from.

Paul's writing is different because he is allowing the experiences of his ministry journey to see God the Father, Christ, Holy Spirit, and his call differently.

Paul has moved from the wide-eyed preacher know-it-all, and follower of Christ that we meet shortly after Paul's road to Damascus conversion to one who has become seasoned with the salt of the journey in Christ's emerging church.

His ministry work has made him humble as it moves him to seek the face of God with every step he takes.

Paul has recognized a very important fact on his journey to building up the church. The fact that “It ain’t about you, servant of God”.

Paul humbly recognized that he must keep his wits about him as he seeks God, rather than rely on his station in life, his prior sacrifices for the work of the kingdom.

Paul has faced the most important question that is posed by God to any follower of God. Can you really give all the credit to God?

And Paul seeks and proclaims in our Epistle writing to the people of Corinth, that it's all about Jesus. His sacrifice on the cross. God's gift of everlasting life that comes through Christ and Christ alone. Paul is a different writer in his earlier letters because he is letting God's spirit grow him to higher and higher heights.

Paul has found renewed joy, love, and dedication to the person of God and the work of His son.

But Paul has been humbled and it is that spirit of humility that focuses on Christ crucified rather than on Paula human eloquence..

Paul evangelized what we now know as the Mediterranean basin and Paul wrote nearly 1/3 of the Bible but Paul speaks with fear and trembling and reverence because he realizes that Preachers and teachers and leaders are just earthen vessels.

Every preacher myself included realizes that they must push their own egos aside because the people of God ask of us one thing. That one thing is found in John 12:21 “sir, we would see Jesus”. The Holy Spirit nudges the preacher aside so that only Jesus and His sacrifice is seen.

That's really the Epiphany Season, that time between Christmas Day and Ash Wednesday is really about.

Epiphany calls us to see Jesus in a new way, and to recognize that we must see Jesus in newness of our own daily lives, as Paul did.

Which brings us to our gospel lesson today. Matthew 5:13-20.

This year we will spend a lot of time with Matthew, in his guide for Faithful Living, known as the Gospel of Matthew. We will weave in and out of Matthew as we move through 2023.

This morning Matthew loudly proclaims what Paul was discovering in a deeper way.

Jesus calls us the light of the world and warns that unless our righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees (who did righteousness in words and deeds as show) in this life, than those Jesus is speaking to will risk their standing in the next life as the reality of their actions are called into question.

Jesus recognized as Isaiah did, that the People's fasting had become pious yet empty acts.

Christ and Isaiah have one theological point made clear this morning. Acts of religious piety as private acts of devotion are meaningless when they are separated from acts of justice and righteousness.

In other words, there was nothing to show as living proof of a God-loving people.

Jesus, continuing in His Sermon on the Mount, declares that “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 underfoot.” (Mt 5:13)

And further “You are the light of the world. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lamp 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 in heaven.” (Mt 5:14a-16)



You are light.

You are salt.

Christ does not say when you get yourself together you will be light or you will be salt.

Christ says you ARE.

Meaning quite simply, the moment you accept Christ to come into your heart, you have the prerequisite to living a life of righteousness.

Christ says you ARE.

Yes, we mess up, because we are human. God has already told us through the prophets and the gospels that in Romans 3:23, “For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”

Jesus doesn't contradict that.

He says He didn't come to abolish the law, but to make the laws governing sin, hell and the grave fulfilled, and finally obsolete.

So once we have Christ within our hearts by accepting Him as our only Lord and Savior we are light. We are the salt of the earth.

The only thing that can stop that light from shining and the salt from properly seasoning and preserving is us in sin.

This is what Paul was coming to understand.

This is what we feel in our growth as Children of The Most High God.

Paul's writings were different because he was growing as a Christian.

We too should be different today as we allow the Spirit of God to change us, the Presence of God to mold us, the Word of God to grow us. We should be different today than we were yesterday.

Last week we looked at the preface to the Sermon on the Mount, The Beattitudes.

In that we discovered that we should not allow our circumstances, other people, the enemy, to place a period where God has intended a comma.

Likewise, we can put a period instead of a comma in other peoples story's.

Imagine if Paul has put a period in his ministry in Athens.

The Jews wanted signs and the Greeks wanted wisdom, and I couldn't give them either one.

Paul could have given up.

I tried to be what everyone wanted me to be and I failed miserably . (Period)

I wasn't enough to plant the church of God myself (period)

I'm a failure in this ministry (period)

Paul could have given up and inserted a period at his underwhelming work in Athens.

But let's see what would have become Paul's Blessed Beatitudes as he turned that ...

Blessed am I to be called to God's work and failing,
(comma) it brought me closer to Christ.

Blessed am I when I preach a poor sermon, (comma) it causes me to seek God face to face

Blessed am I when I fail at growing the church in Athens as it did in other places, (comma) it forced me to introduce others to the God who never fails.

Think of how we often speak of our relatives, especially our spouses.

You always do ...

You never do ...

Imagine if we let the light of Christ shine into difficult moments that our relatives may be going through .

I might look like this in our homes

Blessed am I when my child fails a test, (comma) it shows us where his weaknesses are.

Blessed am I when my spouse/child/health disappoints me, (comma) it shows where I have to pray.

Blessed am I when my spouse/child disappoints me,
(comma) it gives me an opportunity to show them grace,
mercy and forgiveness.

The call to discipleship and faithful living is crafted and
secured by a Jesus who understands what it means to
walk this journey on earth.

He gives us exactly what we need to answer His call to us.

The ability to light the world for Jesus and to be the seasoned preservative of Christ's will and His Church are already within us. There is not condition.

Jesus doesn't says "you might" be the salt, or "you may get the light'

Jesus says "you are the light" and "you are the salt" because once we accept Him into our hearts as our Savior he gives us all that we need to be His Church.

He invites us to His table, to feast with and adore Him.
He beckons us to be like Paul and recognize none of us
has it all together. None of us is perfect but Him.

He invites us to come at His table because He makes it
possible to even be here.

Accept that Christ has made you the Salt and the Light and don't quench His spirits within you.

Seek His face when you fall. He'll pick you back up. He'll set you right at His table, because when He looked at you he didn't place a period at your acceptance of Him. He put a comma that your story would be written by His new pen and on His new piece of paper.

And when you look at other people who have failed you, remember God loves them too. Like Paul and you and everybody else, they are on their own journey with the Lord, and He is writing their story as well. Exercise with them the forgiveness that God has granted to you.

Children of God, you are the Salt and the Light. Rejoice.
AMEN.