

“YOU ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH ... YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.”

Have you ever seen a stained-glass window? We had winkle this past Monday at St. Peter's in Hannover. Their sanctuary is lined with these beautiful stained-glass windows. I was sitting in the pew, marveling, just marveling, not only at their detailed design, but how wonderfully they told the story of Jesus.

I ask you if you have ever seen a stained-glass window because we find ourselves in the season of Epiphany. In this season of Epiphany, we celebrate the appearing of God in human body. Christ, the light of the world, has shined in this world darkened by sin.

This Sunday reminds us of what we live in Christ and Christ lives in us. *“You are the light of the world,”* Jesus says. The light of Christ shines through us. United to Christ by faith, we Christians are a reflection of Jesus Christ [BANNER]. As light shines through a stained-glass window, Jesus, the light of the world, shines through us so that people may see the love and compassion of Jesus our Savior in us.

The interesting thing about a stained-glass window is that in and of itself, it has no light nor any energy to produce light, nor any capacity to produce light. The Bible tells us that are like stained glass windows. We are useless apart from Christ. We are dead in sin. By nature, we give off no light. This is why Jesus says: *“Apart from me you can do nothing (Jn 15:5).”*

Baptism changes all of that. In that blessed washing of regeneration, we are cleansed of all sin. We die to sin and all evil desires and

inclinations. We rise in Christ to a new life, a life that has no end. We are "little Christ's." We have no appetite for sin. We live by God's will. We are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

In our day and age, doctors generally warn us that salt is not too good of a thing to eat in large quantities. But, salt was used for a far different purpose at the time Jesus walked upon this earth. The people of Jesus' day did not have refrigeration to preserve and keep food from decay. So, they used salt. Just as salt preserved food from corruption, so Christians living in Christ preserve this world from corruption.

As light shines on a stained-glass window so that everyone can see its beauty, the light of Christ has shined on us and we reflect His beauty. Jesus says to us, "*Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven*". The sinful flesh wants to attract attention to itself. It wants the praise of men. But, Christians desire to draw attention to God. We do good works, just as Christ did good works. We know of course we are not saved by good works. "*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, nor a result of works, so that no one may boast*" (Eph 2:8-9). We are saved by faith in Jesus Christ and by faith alone. But, just as light is proof that a candle is burning, so good works are proof, a confession, that we are in Christ.

As the salt of the earth and the light of the world, there is great temptation for us to love the darkness more than Jesus. The devil, the world, and our own flesh would have us forget who we are in Christ to live for ourselves. "*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*". When we, Christian saints, give into the temptation to

live for sin, we lose our ability to counter the corruption of a fallen world and we are worthless in God's sight.

*"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".* Who would do such a ridiculous thing as light a lamp and put it under a basket? The idea of a lamp is obvious; you light it to give off light. We are in Christ. To hide what we are in Christ is a sin. He has washed us of our sin, raised us to eternal life in Him, and made us new in Him. No one would light a lamp to hide it under a basket. Therefore, why would we hide our faith in Christ?

These words of Jesus are a stern warning to Christians not to live according to the flesh. Whenever we sin in our thoughts, words, or deeds, we sin against God and deny Christ. Paul writes in the book of Galatians:

"Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these" (Ga 5:19-21).

So I ask you: What are you showing in your life today? Are you reflecting the light of Christ, showing that you are the salt of the earth and the light of the world? Or, are you showing the works of the flesh?

When we see what kind of life and conduct God demands of us, we know that we have failed. But we do not despair nor give up, because God has Good News for us. When we repent, tell God that we are sorry for failing to live for Him in our thoughts, words, and deeds, God forgives us.

We poor, miserable sinners cling by faith to Christ because God pronounces us righteous for His sake. *"For I tell you,"* Jesus says in our Gospel, *"unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and*

*Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven".* The scribes and Pharisees believed they were not dead in sin. They believed that they could earn eternal life from God by their works. Jesus is telling us that our works, our righteousness, do not make us right with God. We need a different kind of righteousness. Our righteousness means comes from Jesus. His blood cleanses us from all sin, so that we are right with God.

Sometimes in the course of earthly life, our bodies become sick. The doctor will give us medicine to make us well. Jesus the Great Physician, gave us medicine for our souls -- His own body and blood to cure us of the fatal disease of sin.

Just as we need food for our physical bodies, we need food for our souls. As God kept the Israelites alive with manna, food, from heaven, He keeps us alive in the faith He gave us in baptism, with the food of His own Body and Blood to eat and drink for the forgiveness of sins.

The Bible tells us: *Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ (Ro 10:17).* The Word of God – the Water and the Word of Holy Baptism, the Word of Holy Absolution, and the Word with the Body and Blood in the Sacrament of the Altar -- forgives us of all sin and strengthens our faith in Christ so that we may cling to Him as our Savior. With a strong faith, we resist the temptation to sin and live for Christ, being the salt that preserves the Father's creation against corruption and being the light that illuminates the path that leads to eternal life in heaven.

We have the privilege of living in a most profound time in the history of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. We have a record number of missionaries serving around the globe. In fact, in the most recent issue of the *Reporter*, the official newspaper of our beloved Synod, the business manager for our LCMS work in Eurasia, wrote a beautiful article about the

work God is doing through our missionaries in Eurasia. That is important work. But, we don't have to go to a far-off country to reflect Christ. Remember, the most important place that you can shine the light of Christ is to your own family, especially raising your children in the fear and admonition of the Lord.

As the salt of the earth and the light of the world, we show Christ to our children, families, and all around us by our attendance at Church, the way we spend our money, the time we spend in God's Word each day. We show Christ by the way we talk to and about our spouses, children, parents, and neighbors. We show Christ by the videos and TV programs we watch.

St. Francis of Assisi: "Preach the Gospel, if necessary, use words." "You are the salt of the earth ... You are the light of the world."

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.