

INI - SDG

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday a. Epiphany  
February 6, 2011  
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church  
Hecla, SD

Text: Matthew 5:13 ***“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.”***

Theme: YOU ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH

- Flavoring and preserving it
- Beware of losing your taste!

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ Jesus,

God did a pretty amazing thing when He combined the elements of sodium and chloride. Those of you who know your chemistry, know that sodium chloride is nothing other than salt. Whether we are talking about the salt in your kitchen or salt in the ocean, it is all as a result of the Master Chemist, God, combining sodium and chloride. While doctors may warn us that too much salt in our diet may cause high blood pressure, it is also true that without salt we could not live.

While we have found many different uses for salt, such as using it to make glass and soap, or to melt the ice on our sidewalks and roads, historically salt has been used for two purposes - to flavor food and also to preserve foods. Without salt food tastes bland or even flat. But salt gives food flavor. No doubt Sarah put salt in the food she prepared for Abraham, and so too Mary when she was cooking for her Son, Jesus. And in the days long before refrigerators and freezers, people would use salt to keep their food from decaying. Whether it was meats or vegetables in the garden, salt was used to preserve the food. Salt draws the moisture out of the food by osmosis, thus preventing or at least delaying the decaying process.

This brings us to our verse this morning. Jesus says to His disciples, ***“You are the salt of the earth.”*** As Christians, we provide flavor tasteless world and preserve a decaying world. But let us beware, just as salt that has lost its saltiness is worthless, so is a Christian who no longer flavors the world! May the Holy Spirit be with us that we may continue to be the salt of the earth.

#### FLAVORING AND PRESERVING IT

Our verse for today comes from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Last week we heard the beginning of it with the beatitudes. These are a series of statements from Jesus about the blessed state of His followers. For instance, ***“Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted.”*** (Mt 5:4) Though as Christians we mourn now over our sin and the sin in the world around us, we are blessed because we know we will be comforted eternally in Jesus.

In verses 13 through 16 of Matthew 5, the focus shifts a little bit. Jesus goes from the beatitudes to talk about Christian sanctification. What we mean when we talk about Christian sanctification in this context is the sanctified or holy living of the Christian. We are talking

about the good works that Christians do.

As we talk about Christian sanctification it is very important that we make clear why and how we do good works. As with everything in the life of a Christian, sanctified living is the work of our gracious God. It is God who became man to save us from our sins. Because we disobeyed the law of God, He kept it perfectly as our substitute. Because we sinned and earned God's wrath and punishment, the Son of God took that punishment on Himself and suffered God's wrath in our place. Jesus earned our salvation and paid for our punishment. Then, when we were born dead in our trespasses and sins, it was God who made us alive together with Christ. He called us to faith. He made us His children.

The same is true when we talk about the sanctified living of the Christian. This too is the work of God. When the Holy Spirit brings us to faith, He creates in us a new man. Our new man of faith is created in God's image and desires only to do God's will. Paul writes to the Philippians that "***it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.***" (Phil 2:13) Jesus says, "***I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.***" (Jn 15:5) Believing and abiding in Jesus, the Christian leads a fruitful life, one that is full of good works. From beginning to end, from our redemption, to our faith, to our Christian lives, from beginning to end God gets all the glory. With this in mind, let us return to our text.

As we mentioned earlier, God showed Himself to be a master chemist when He created salt. God also did an amazing thing when He combined His Holy Spirit in our lives. He made us believers in Jesus Christ for salvation. Now as believers in Christ, Jesus tells us, "***You are the salt of the earth.***" Now, what does Jesus mean in calling us "the salt of the earth." Well, we need to remember what salt was used for in those days - flavoring and preserving. And that is the very thing that we do as Christians.

First let's consider how we flavor it. The world we live in is full of sin. Even man's best deeds are made sour by sin. Remember what the LORD said about the earth before He sent the flood? "***The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.***" (Gen 6:5) Selfishness and hate abound. The world calls that which good evil, and that which is evil good.

This is where we as Christians come in. We supply flavoring to this world by the good works which the Spirit works in us. Take for instance your station in life. Christian husbands and wives, think of the flavoring you bring to a world that despises and belittles sin. Husbands, as other men around you act like pigs and treat women like they are nothing more than sex objects, you bring flavor as you love your wife as your own body. You bear with her in her weaknesses. You support her, you defender, and you love her with a sacrificial love such as Christ had for the Church that caused Him to die for her.

Wives, while women around you bad mouth their husbands and talk about how childish they are, as the salt of the earth you bring flavor when you willingly submit to your husband as your head, just as the Church submits to Christ as her head. While other women disrespect and talk down their husbands, you flavor the world by respecting your husbands. You reflect the attitude of Sarah who called her husband Abraham her lord out of submission and respect.

You young ladies. The young girls of today act and dress pretty racy. They try to show off their bodies to get attention from boys. But as the salt of the earth, you flavor the earth by remembering that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. Rather than focusing so much on your external looks, as Peter writes, "***rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the***

*incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.” (1 Pt 3:3)*

Children, as Christians you too are the salt of the earth. Just think about how your classmates and friends disrespect and despise their parents and teachers. As the salt of the earth you bring flavor to the world when you honor your parents and teachers. When your friends talk about how stupid their parents are for the rules they made, you give the world flavor when you speak lovingly and respectfully about your parents.

We even bring flavor to the world in our jobs. Think of how your co-workers belittle and despise the job they have and their employers. Maybe they are only hard workers when the boss is around. They bad-mouth their boss and their fellow workers. But you are the salt of the earth. You realize the work you are doing, you are doing to the glory of God. We serve the Lord and that flavors our work ethic, how we treat our co-workers, and respect we show our employers.

This is all the work of the Holy Spirit in us. He has made us the salt of the earth. If Christians were not supplying flavor to the world, God would have long ago destroyed this tasteless world. It is only the Christians who make this world palatable to God. And in this way we serve as preserving agent as the salt of the earth.

A comparison of the preserving power of the Christian's salt, might be that of Sodom and Gomorrah. Remember how the LORD revealed to Abraham that He was going to destroy these cities, ***“Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave.”*** (Gen 18:16) At that point Abraham began to ask the LORD that if there were 50 righteous persons in the city, would He still destroy it? Then he asked about 45, then 40, then 30, then 20, then 10. The LORD's response for each - 50 through 10 - was that for the sake of the righteous He would not destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. The salt of the earth would preserve those cities.

The fact that the world is still spinning today is because of the salt of the earth. If not for the flavoring that the Christian brings by his good works, God would have long ago spit out this distasteful world of sin. In a world that is dying and decaying because of sin and death, God is preserving the world for the sake of His elect. As the salt of the earth we flavor and preserve it.

#### BEWARE OF LOSING YOUR TASTE!

How much of our daily activity and choices, do you think we make out of a desire to fit in? Think about it. The clothing we wear, the things we say, the shows we watch, the music we listen to, it seems that so much of our time and energy is spent on trying to fit in. We do not want to be seen as odd or weird. But with whom are we trying to fit in? We must confess that all too often it is with the unbelieving world. It is one thing when trying to fit in influences the brand of jeans we are going to buy, it is entirely another thing when trying to fit in with the world determines our choice of activities.

This is where Jesus' words of warning come into play. ***“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.”*** If salt no longer supplies flavor and cannot be used for preserving foods, what good is it? It is good for nothing. In Luke we hear Jesus saying of such salt that it is not even fit for the land or for the manure pile. So to get rid of that useless salt, people would simply throw it out into the street where it would be trampled under people's feet.

Do you understand the comparison and warning Jesus is giving us here? If we are the salt of the earth, but we are not flavoring the world with our good works - what good are we? We are

like saltless salt! We are good for nothing. We are no different than the unbelieving world! We are distasteful to God and are spit out. The writer to the Hebrews warns of the same thing, ***“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.”*** (Heb 6:4-6)

We must confess that we have often failed in bringing flavor to this sinful world. All too often we have tried to fit in with the bland flavor of the unbeliever. Praise be to God that He has had mercy on us! He gave His Son Jesus into death for our sins and weakness. And for Jesus' sake God has forgiven us for our lack of saltiness.

How can we keep from losing our flavor? This too is the work of God. God keeps our faith alive and active by His Means of Grace. This morning, right now, the Holy Spirit is at work in your hearts to build up your faith through His Word. Soon, our communicant members will be coming forward to receive the body and blood of Jesus for the strengthening of their faith. These are the tools that the Holy Spirit uses to keep your faith alive and active. Abiding in Jesus, you will bear good fruits. Through the Gospel, the Holy Spirit keeps us flavorful!

You are salt, Jesus says, so be salt! May the Holy Spirit ever work in us and through us that we may bring flavor to this tasteless world of sin, that we may preserve this dying world to spread the Gospel to all creatures. May the Holy Spirit ever keep us salty! Amen.