

FIFTH SUNDAY after the EPIPHANY
February 9, 2020
Worship & KidsConnect! 9:30 AM

*"Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works
and give glory to your Father in heaven." – Matthew 5:16*

ORDER OF WORSHIP

PRELUDE

Morning Has Broken

<http://www.gbod3.org/sorter/audio/2166.mp3>

WELCOME

Glad you made it! Sign in, please.

Youth Pie Auction today – parade of pies may be coming through the sanctuary as the children go to KidsConnect this morning...

Next Sunday we install the elected leaders of our church. If you are one of those elected leaders, please be here!

Let's worship the Lord.

I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me

FWS 2153

<http://www.gbod3.org/sorter/audio/2153.mp3>

Seek Ye First

UMH 405

***CALL TO WORSHIP from Psalm 112**

Leader: Praise the Lord!

**People: Happy are those who fear the Lord,
who greatly delight in his commandments.**

Leader: They rise in the darkness as a light for the upright;

People: They are gracious, merciful, and righteous.

Leader: It is well with those who deal generously,
who conduct their affairs with justice.

**People: For the righteous will never be moved;
their hearts are firm, secure in the Lord.**

Lord Whose Love Through Humble Service

UMH 581

<http://www.gbod3.org/sorter/audio/581.mp3>

FIRST READING

Isaiah 58:1-9a (OT 688)

SECOND READING

1 Corinthians 2:1-12 (NT 166)

KIDSCONNECT!

Read the book, *When God Made You* as a description of how we are salt and light in the world. Remind children that we shine more brightly together, and one grain of salt isn't as tasty as several together. Pray. Pie parade.

Bring Forth the Kingdom

FWS 2190

MESSAGE

"Salt and Light"

Pastor Jo Anne

Matthew 5:13-20 (NT 4)

He was caught between two worlds. Memories of home brought some comfort, but there was sadness, too. He knew there was no going back. Everything had changed, and he knew that the place he had once called "home" no longer existed. It had been destroyed, and all his friends and family had been scattered. He'd managed to get out alive, but the life of a refugee was full of challenges. So here he was, in Syria, speaking a new language, trying to live out his faith in a culture that was different from anything he'd ever known.

He had found a few other refugees in this strange city. They had started to meet together to pray, to talk about their faith. But when they told the familiar stories to one another, they found that the details were getting fuzzy, and they didn't always agree on the order of events, or the meaning behind them. They had asked him to be their pastor, and he had accepted the call to lead them. As he prayed for guidance, it became clear to him that he needed to write down the story as best he could remember it.

So he gathered the notes he had collected, the stories others had written, and the letters he had found. He was grateful for his friend, Mark, who had scratched out a rough draft earlier, and he used Mark's words as his starting point. But he knew that this story needed to reach a specific group of people: people like himself who were caught between two worlds.

The Jews no longer accepted them, but they certainly weren't Gentiles, either. They wanted to be faithful to the whole story. They didn't think for a moment that they had an exclusive claim on Jesus, but they knew his teaching was so deeply rooted in the story of Israel, that it just didn't make sense to tell it apart from Torah and the writings of the prophets.

Yet, this good news of God's promise to his people was meant for everyone, Jews and Gentiles alike. So the story had to be rooted in Jewish history, but understood by all who would read it, wherever they lived, whatever their background.

Pastor Matt put down his pen and rubbed his eyes. This business of writing words was exhausting. Matt was much more comfortable adding up numbers. He picked up the manuscript, and read over what he had managed to get down on papyrus so far. It didn't seem like much.

He had listed the generations leading up to Jesus, and told about the events surrounding his birth. He had described the baptism and temptation in the desert, and the way Jesus had called his first disciples. Now came the hard part, remembering the things Jesus had said as he taught them day after day. Starting with the blessings had helped.

You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope.
With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you.
Only then can you be embraced by the *One* who is most dear to you.

You're blessed when you're content with just who you are—no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought.

You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God.
He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat.

You're blessed when you care.
At the moment of being 'care-full,' you find yourselves cared for.

You're blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right.
Then you can see God in the outside world.

You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight.
That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family.

You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution.
The persecution drives you even deeper in to God's kingdom.

"Yes," Matt thought. "That's exactly where I am, deep in God's kingdom while I'm persecuted by this Roman one." The memory of Jesus' voice echoed in his mind. The words came to him in a flood. He picked up his pen, and started to write...

*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 under foot.*

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid.

No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, 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.

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.

For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:13-20)

Matt put down his pen again, and breathed the words we say every Sunday when we hear the Good News: This is the Word of the Lord, **thanks be to God.**

We don't know exactly when the Gospel of Matthew was written. Some scholars think Jerusalem had already been destroyed, while others think Matthew's story appeared only a year or two after Mark's, in the middle of the first century.

We also don't know exactly where the author was living when he wrote this version of the story, but the best guess is Syria, probably in the city of Antioch.

We do know that Matthew had a particular audience in mind. He was writing primarily to the Jewish Christians who had been scattered throughout the Roman Empire. These believers had been expelled from the Jewish synagogues, but their identity was still rooted in Judaism.

At the same time, more and more Gentiles were coming to believe in Jesus, and Matthew wanted to give them some background in Jewish history and culture, so their new faith would have strong roots.

Caught between two worlds, Matthew saw Jesus as the fulfillment of Judaism, even though Judaism had rejected Jesus. He wanted to explain Christianity to the Jews, while helping them

to find their new identity with Gentile Christians as the people of God. Matthew borrowed heavily from Mark's earlier Gospel, but he knew that the best way to convey the truth about Jesus was to use the words Jesus had spoken.

So Matthew's Gospel account is framed by the sermons and teachings of Jesus, gathered into five "discourses" or speaking sections. The first of these is the Sermon on the Mount. Last week, we heard the familiar blessings that open this sermon. They are familiar to us now, but they were radical words when Jesus first spoke them.

Jesus was trying to reframe the way his followers saw the world. Instead of mindlessly obeying a long list of rules, Jesus was urging his disciples to see that God's Kingdom had come into the present, and each of us has a role to fulfill within that kingdom.

Notice that Jesus doesn't say, "You *should* be salt and light," or "Please be salt and light," or "Here's *how* you can be salt and light," or even "I command you to be salt and light." Jesus isn't asking us to *change into* salt and light, because *it's something we already are*. Jesus says, "You *are* the salt of the earth. You *are* the light of the world."

Salt held a lot of meaning for the people of Israel. For one thing, it was a sign of covenant. Every agreement, to be legal, included the sharing of salt. We may think salt's primary use is to add flavor to food; but it was also used as a preservative – important in a time and place where refrigeration didn't exist.

Salt was also valued for its cleansing and healing properties. Have you ever gargled with salt water when you had a sore throat? In fact, your body's salt content is quite similar to that of sea water – salt is a fundamental part of life.

When Jesus says, "You are salt," he's telling us "You are a fundamental part of the way things are supposed to be in God's kingdom." As salt, we are a sign of God's covenant with the world, and his promise to redeem it from brokenness. As salt, we are important to God's work of healing and preserving his good creation.

It isn't something *we* do or have to work toward. We are the seasoning that puts God's stamp on this world, as he works through us to bring his kingdom to completion. How can salt not be salty, Jesus asks? It can't.

You are salt *and* light. Light can't be anything else but light. Its primary function is to eliminate darkness. Light was the very first thing God created. And light is also directly connected to God's covenant with his chosen people. In Isaiah 42:6 God says, "I, the LORD, have called you for a good reason. I will grasp your hand and guard you, and give you **as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations.**"

We can't hide our light under a bucket, either. We have no choice but to shine. The question is, how are we shining? How are we reflecting God's light into the world around us?

Jesus says, "let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." Wait a minute. See our good works? That sounds a lot like following the law.

But Jesus is already a step ahead of us. "I didn't come to abolish the law, but fulfill it," he says. Not one tiny mark of the Law will disappear until it is completely fulfilled, and that is what Jesus came to do.

There was nothing wrong with keeping Torah, but the Pharisees had made it into a checklist of behaviors to gain favor with God, a 'how-to manual' for keeping themselves holy. Jesus saw Torah through the eyes of the Kingdom of God, where righteousness seeks God's justice and cares about the welfare of others. The Pharisees thought the fulfillment of God's promises lay in the future, but God was already doing a new thing. The kingdom of God was in their midst, just as it is in ours right now.

Christ came to fulfill the *spirit* of Torah. The scribes and Pharisees had forgotten its focus on righteousness. Not the kind of righteousness that comes from obeying all the rules – but the kind of righteousness that seeks the good of others, helping those in need, caring for those no one else cares about.

Later in Matthew, Jesus will tell the Pharisees, "You've done a great job of tithing your spices, but you forgot to feed the hungry. You should have done both." (Matt 23:23) Instead of limiting your teaching to the rules, you should have been teaching people to love one another.

So what are we teaching by the way we live our lives? How is our light shining: brightly or dimly? And what does that tell the world we really believe? How are we seasoning the world and marking it as God's beloved creation?

Or maybe we need to ask ourselves, what do we let get in the way of our light, preventing it from shining into the darkness around us? What happens when your saltiness gets diluted, or your light starts to fade? What keeps us from being everything God calls us to be as followers of Jesus?

And if those questions ring true for you, how did you get to such a place? Did you start depending on your own efforts to be righteous? Did you decide it was just too hard to keep shining all the time? If your faith is not sustaining you, what are you putting your faith in? Where are you devoting your thoughts and your energy, preventing you from devoting yourself to following Jesus?

Is your time and energy spent in knowing Christ more deeply, or do you fill your time indulging your own pleasure, taking care of your own concerns? Do you show Christ plainly in your speech and actions, or do you hide your faith under a bucket, hoping no one will ask you why you believe what you say you believe?

Our righteousness shows in lives seasoned with love and light that shines in the darkness. Christ calls us to live well-seasoned lives, lives that uncover God's light for others to see. That light shines, not because we make it shine, but because of what God is doing in and among us.

As salt and light, *we are the sign that God keeps his promises.*

So the question isn't, what do we need to do *to make ourselves* salt and light in the world, but how *has Christ made me to be* salt and light?

How am I cooperating with God in the process of becoming more and more like Christ?

What am I doing and saying that seasons the world around me with God's love and shows God to others who can't see him yet?"

How is my life reflecting God's grace in such a way that it shines on others who haven't experienced that grace yet?

How do I see Jesus, and show Jesus, and share Jesus, so that others might come to know Jesus, too?

I invite you to continue to ponder these questions throughout the coming week. And to help you remember to do that, I invite you to take a small container of salt with you after you've participated in the Pie Auction downstairs today.

It's kosher salt. You could use it on your food, but I invite you to keep it as a symbol of your covenant with God, the one that you remembered at the beginning of this season of Epiphany, when we reaffirmed our baptismal promises.

Let it be a sign for you throughout the coming week that you have a purpose. You have a place in God's kingdom. Your place and your purpose is simple.

Be salt.

Be light.

So that others will see Jesus in you.

Let's pray.

***PRAYER**

O God, You are the source of eternal light: in the new heaven and the new earth, there will be no need of sun or moon, because you alone will be our light. Shine your unending day upon us who watch for you.

Let *our* lights shine so that the whole earth will also worship you, all nations obey you, all tongues confess and bless you, and men and women everywhere love you and serve you in peace. Help us to reflect your light so clearly, that we show Jesus in every part of our lives.

Keep us good and salty, seasoning the world around us with your grace and your justice. Let us be signs pointing to your promise of redemption. Let us bring healing and righteousness to the hurting and the oppressed.

Let our lips praise you, our lives bless you, and our worship give you glory. Give us this day such blessing through our worship of you, that the week to come may be spent in your favor, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray, saying, "Our Father,..."

***THE LORD'S PRAYER**

OFFERING

Your offering last week empowered ministry within our congregation and in response to the needs of our community. Through our apportioned giving, it also supports the work done at Discipleship Ministries to develop curriculum and resources for local churches like ours.

Ministries like these happen, because people of The United Methodist Church live and give connectionally. I invite you to give generously, as we worship God through sharing our gifts, tithes, and offerings.

Offertory:

Just A Closer Walk With Thee

<http://www.gbod3.org/sorter/audio/2158.mp3>

***DOXOLOGY**

UMH 95

Holy God of mercy and might, you have called us to "flavor" the world with compassion and to illuminate the world with generous spirits. We give this morning with grateful hearts, hoping that in our giving the spotlight doesn't fall on us but on you! Bless the offering we give, and may the world come to know you and your son, as our light shines. We

pray this in the name of your son, Jesus the Christ, who is love and light to the world. Amen. (*Matthew 5:13-20*)

*Sent Out In Jesus' Name

FWS 2184

<http://www.gbod3.org/sorter/audio/2184.mp3>

*BENEDICTION

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. Amen. 2 Corinthians 13:14

*THREEFOLD AMEN

*POSTLUDE

Sent Out In Jesus' Name