

You are the Salt of the Earth
Matthew 5:13-16, Trinity Sunday III
July 2, 2006

Beloved of the Lord.....Salt is a very necessary part of our world. Salt is very important for several reasons. Salt is a necessary part of our human diet. We need at least some salt in our diet in order to live. Salt is also a food preservative. Years ago, before there were refrigerators, the pioneers of our country would heavily salt their meat in order to preserve it. Meat that is salted takes longer to decay. Another use of salt is for flavor enhancement. This summer as you sit down to eat some good and juicy sweet corn, most likely you will shake some salt on it. It just tastes better that way. Salt helps to bring out the flavor of almost any food.

For reasons such as these, Jesus told His disciples that they were the salt of the earth. This corrupt world needs the "salty" disciples of the Lord. But if this "salt" loses its flavor, it is good for nothing, and therefore to be cast out under the foot of men. That is the thing about salt. If it is exposed too long to the elements such as rain or snow, or if it sits in storage for too long a period, there is a chemical change in its composition. It ceases to be salt. And once this salt ceases to be salt, its only remaining use is to be cast upon sidewalks providing traction, like sand. "It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men."

So what does all of this mean? Consider the corruptness of our world today. It is like a decaying piece of meat. This world is utterly corrupted and consumed by sin. Therefore it has absolutely no value or merit. Truly the only "good" which exists in this world is the Christian, the salt of the earth, those who are disciples of Christ. And this Christian is "good" only in the sense that he has by faith received the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ. This cleansing blood makes the believer clean and white, like a grain of salt. Therefore, Christians, as the "salt of the earth", help to prevent the further decay of this world. But when Jesus says "ye are the salt of the earth", He is not preaching to the earth, but to the "salt" of the earth. This message of Jesus is for His disciples, the believers. And His main message is this. What good is a Christian, if he no longer does good works? What good is salt, if it has no lost its flavor? Indeed is "salt" salt, if it has lost its flavor? By the same token, is the Christian, a Christian, if it does not do good works? And so the Bible says, "Faith without works is dead, being alone." Where there are no good works, there are no Christians. Therefore we rightly say good works are necessary. Good works are necessary, because our blessed Lord Jesus has said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

I. What are some good works that I can do? But when we say good works are necessary, let us remember good works are NOT necessary for salvation. But what does this mean?

When we say good works are not necessary for salvation, we say what is a Biblical truth. For "by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast." Eph 2:8,9 Therefore when we say we are saved by faith alone, it means that we are not saved at all by good works. When we as Lutherans say we are saved by faith alone, we mean that it is by Christ alone that we are saved, and not by our own good works. "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son, cleanseth us from all sin." Man's salvation is God's good and glorious work alone, by grace alone, by faith alone. **AND SO WE RIGHTLY SAY, GOOD WORKS ARE NOT NECESSARY FOR SALVATION.** On the other hand, good works ARE necessary in that God has commanded them. And whatever God commands, indeed it is necessary. Titus 3:8 says, "They which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men. " Where there is faith in Christ for the remission of sins, there will always be good works flowing like a stream from the heart which has been redeemed.

But just what are these good works that are necessary and how are we to do them? Several points need to be made here. First, you the believer are the salt of the earth. Jesus says you are the light of the world! Your good works are to be done in order to point people to heaven that they may glorify their heavenly Father above. For right now remember that this world sits in the darkness of unbelief. This world is like a decaying piece of meat which is only preserved for the sake of the Christians that are in it. But God wants ALL men to be saved, and you being the light of the world, are to bear the light of Christ to others. Therefore mission work must be a part of each believers life. That is, through Christ you are the light, a city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Moreover God has worked the knowledge of His Word into your heart by baptism and the Living Word.

But perhaps you think, "I am no missionary. I am not a pastor. I am not knowledgeable enough to talk to others about God!" But if a Christian were ever to say that to me I would say "baloney". I would answer "Are you not a Christian? Do you not know Christ by faith? Don't you know He has redeemed you?" Those who know Christ by faith have God's own Spirit living in their hearts! God is with them wherever they go, at all times and all places. Jesus is the Living Word, living in your heart by faith, dear child of God! Do not say you cannot witness about Him to others! You can and you will, if you follow Christ! It is true, we are all (pastor's included), not the best missionaries. But here we must turn to the fountain of our strength, which is Jesus. Through Him you can say "I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me." God will help you do what you need to do. Therefore dear missionary, have faith in Him.

To witness of Christ to others is indeed a good work. It is God-pleasing. Here keep in mind much mission work begins in the home. Jesus said, "Neither do men light a

candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house." You, the Christian, are a light within your own household. You are a candle that gives light to your children, grandchildren, brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers - all bases here covered. 'Tis true, we all feel like quite poor, dim, and flickering candles. It is hard to speak God's Word even to our own families. Often in our own minds we cripple ourselves thinking, "But I've tried before to no avail!" Or "they don't listen to me....my words fall on deaf ears." We have many excuses and reasons to say nothing. But above our poor reasoning, rising above all our excuses, there is our own Savior who died on the cross to redeem us AND those we are afraid to talk to. Our blessed Lord and Savior invites all to Him saying, "Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." May God help us to be ready instruments in His hands when it comes to witnessing to our own families.

But there are still more good works we should consider. For all good works follow under the Ten Commandments. Mission work falls under the Second Table of the Law, namely "Thou shalt love Thy neighbor as Thyself." Now let us briefly consider the first commandment in the Second Table of the Law, namely commandment number four which says, *Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother, that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.* What does this mean? *We should fear and love God that we may not despise our parents and masters, nor provoke them to anger, but give them honor, serve and obey them, and hold them in love and esteem.* This is a tough commandment to follow. For by nature we are rebellious against all authority, whatever shape or form. We should keep in mind here that parents are not the only authority figures in this world which God has provided. The explanation says "parents and masters". Our masters are also our elders, stepfather or stepmother, guardian, all government authorities, police, sheriff, bailiff, and especially our employers. Thus even at our place of employment we have "masters" whom we are to obey. But let us not overlook the main incumbents of this office, namely our own father and mother. We are to honor and respect them no matter how old they are we may be. To honor is to obey. Do not let this world deceive you with the common lie that you can love your parents but not obey them. Such is horrible lie devised by the devil himself. No!...to honor and love is to obey. If we do not obey them, we do not love them.

In short, whenever we consider just what a good work is, we should always turn to the Ten Commandments. For every good work that God commands of us is clearly laid out in the law. May God help us to do good works, by keeping His commandments, for the Bible says, "Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." I Jn 2:3,4 Jesus also told us, "If you love me, keep my commandments."

II. What is this light that shines within us? Our final focus for this morning will be on verse sixteen of our text in which Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Clearly God wants those men who live in the darkness of unbelief, to see the good works of His own children, in order that they may come to faith and glorify Him who lives above. But here note, when we do good works, we dare not do them to draw attention to ourselves. To do so is to commit the sin of the Pharisee. Of the Pharisees Jesus said, "But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, [They] love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues." Jesus said "They have their reward." Mt. 6 Their reward was to be admired by the world of men who considers a good work as any good deed, regardless of repentance and faith.

But if you were to add up all the good works of all Pharisees for all time, and if all these good deeds stacked up like mountains before the eyes of men, all these mountains of "good deeds" could not atone for one single sin - nor could all these "good deeds" earn for even one single person a fraction of a second of time in heaven! Only Christ can redeem the sinner from sin. Only Christ can save! Thanks be to God every believer knows this glorious truth! "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." I Tim. 1:15 And so the light of Christ shines within us by faith. He is the Light, and He brings to our hearts His Light, and it is the Light of Faith, the knowledge of God's redemption, the redemption of a lost and sinful race, redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ! Truly, this Light, the Light of Christ, the light and knowledge of God's grace, is THAT LIGHT which we bring to the world. It is because we carry and bear THAT LIGHT, that we do good works, those works which are truly pleasing to God by faith, that others may learn of His grace by faith, and come to the knowledge of the truth. They come out of darkness, into His marvelous light! We then, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, are to bear witness to Christ, by a lifetime of good works, not so that we may receive glory of men, but so that we may glorify the true LIGHT of our lives, which is Jesus Christ our Lord. We then are like mirrors placed upon this earth, throughout the world. God's grace has shined down upon us like the sun, and we reflect that grace out (away from ourselves) toward others, that they too may receive the Light of Christ, by receiving the joyous Gospel message into their hearts. May our blessed Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, help us to be faithful stewards of that Light, the grace of God in Christ Jesus. May His love for us, be reflected out from us, that they too may glorify their Father and our Father, who art indeed in heaven. Amen.

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