



Pentecost 9

August 6, 2017 – 9:30 a.m.

Rev. Todd Goldschmidt, Pastor

**Theme: You Are the “Salt of the Earth” & the
“Light of the World”!**

Sermon Text: Matthew 5:13-16 (NIV)

¹³“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

¹⁴“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

A stylized graphic featuring a black cross with a small figure on top. Below the cross, the words "Salt Light" are written in a large, black, cursive font. Underneath that, "Matthew 5:13-16" is written in a smaller, black, cursive font.

Salt Light
Matthew 5:13-16



I'm looking out at a group of seasoned sermon listeners. Most of you have been on the listening end of hundreds, if not thousands, of sermons. And if you grew up in the Lutheran church—or if you have been a member of this congregation for any length of time—there's a good chance that you've noticed a trend. The sermon text changes from week to week, but the focus remains the same. Most Lutheran sermons stress the importance of what God has done for us and place a secondary emphasis on what we as Christians do for God. And there is a good reason for that.

Preachers never want to imply that our salvation depends on human performance. No matter how much good a person does, it'll never be enough to cancel out the bad. No matter how good people try to be, on their own they can never be good enough. Salvation is a gift of God's grace. Undeserved love. Unconditional love. A love that motivated God the Father to sacrifice His Only Son. A love that moved Jesus to sacrifice His life for His friends, for His enemies, for the sins of the world, for you and for me. We're saved because our Savior saved us. Period. Sadly, that's where many Lutheran sermons end. Maybe preachers are afraid that the precious truths revived by Luther will somehow be lost again. Or do we focus so much on Christ's work for us that we fail to highlight our grateful response as Christians?

It doesn't have to be that way. It really shouldn't be that way, because good works play an important role in the life of a believer. And it shouldn't surprise us that Jesus mentions good works early and often in His Sermon on the Mount. Addressing the disciples who'd gathered around Him that day, preaching to His followers who are gathered here today, the Lord tells us . . .

You Are the Salt of the Earth and the Light of the World!

To make His point, Jesus begins by using two metaphors, the first of which is: **“You are the salt of the earth.”** What did Jesus mean by that? What property of salt is also a trait of a Christian? Common table salt is typically used to season food, but you'd be hard pressed to find salt and pepper shakers in the middle of Jewish dinner tables. So that's not the point. In some parts of the country, the brutal weather they endure has turned salt into a precious commodity because it melts the snow and ice on roads and walkways. But what we consider to be harsh winter weather was extremely rare in ancient Israel. So that's not the point.

In Jesus' day salt served another important purpose. Before the invention of refrigeration, salt was the primary means to preserve food. It made food last longer. It kept meat from spoiling. The preservative properties of salt saved food... and lives. That's the point. Like salt, Christians are the preservatives of the world. For the sake of His elect, God has chosen not to destroy the world. And because of the way we live and the witness we give, Christians make this world a better place. . . ***If***. That only happens ***if*** we live our faith, and ***if*** we give a clear confession of our faith. But what happens ***if*** we don't? Jesus tackled that question when He asked: **“If salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.”**



Salt that loses its saltiness has no real purpose. Jesus says that you might as well throw it away. But Jesus wasn't talking about salt, was He? He was talking to people who claimed to be His disciples—people like us. And in the middle of His sermon He gives us a not-so-subtle warning. Being a Christian is a serious responsibility. Living as a Christian in an unchristian and increasingly anti-Christian world won't be easy. Cynics and skeptics will watch our every move, and when we say things and do things that contradict our faith, they'll be quick to call our Christianity into question. Like it or not, we're always bearing witness to what we believe. The question we need ask ourselves today is: What kind of witness am I? Are my words and actions always seasoned with salt? Does the way I live my life have a preserving effect on the people around me? Or if I was put on trial for being a Christian would there be enough evidence to convict me?

When Christians do live their faith, they'll be noticed too. When we confess our faith, we'll stand out. Not like a sore thumb. Like a shining beacon. As Jesus told His disciples: **“You are the light of the world.”** If those words sound familiar, it might be because Jesus applied them to Himself when He stated: **“I am the light of the world”** (John 8:12). Jesus is like the sun. He's the source of light. He gives light to the earth. He scatters the darkness of sin. His light and His love shine in our hearts. We're like the moon. The light doesn't originate within us, but it's reflected by us. A full moon isn't as bright as the sun, but it can light up the darkest sky. And you don't have to wonder if it'll be there when you look up at night. You can count on it. You can rely on it. You can even set your calendar by it.

For the same reason Jesus didn't tell His disciples that they had the potential to be the light of the world or that if they worked hard they might become the light of the world. If you're a Christian—if you trust in Jesus as your Savior from sin—you **are** the light of the world. And if you are, you'll do what lights do. You'll shine. Jesus put it this way: **“A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”**

Martin Luther once said that good works don't make a Christian, but a Christian will make good works. Sinful human beings can never do enough to earn a place in heaven. At first that might sound depressing, but it's really liberating. It relieves the pressure. It removes the heavy burden from our back. Doing good works isn't an obligation, it's a privilege. It's how we say, “thanks” to God for all that He's done for us. If love for God is the #1 incentive for us to do good works, love for God's people ranks a close 2nd. When we see people in need we want to help them, not so it'll make us look good, or feel better about ourselves, or earn us brownie points with God. Jesus loved people, and so do we. Jesus cared about people, and so do we. Christian love imitates the love of Christ, who came into this world **“not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many”** (Mark 10:45).

Love for God. Love for our neighbor. Those are two good reasons for Christians to let their lights shine, but they aren't the only reasons. Jesus reminds us that there's another good reason for doing good works. He encourages us to look beyond the impact our actions will make on this earth and envision how God can work through our good works to bring souls to heaven: **“Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and**



praise your Father in heaven.” Do you get what that means? When Christians witness to unbelievers those unbelievers might become believers and someday stand next to the rest of us in heaven! Jesus doesn't get into specifics here. He leaves it up to us to fill in the details. So, let's do that. Let's spend just a couple minutes imagining how God can work through our good works to do His miraculous work of conversion.

You've just received some devastating news while at work. Maybe it's a lay-off notice. Maybe it's a cancer diagnosis. Maybe it's the news that a loved one has died suddenly and unexpectedly. You tell your co-workers what happened, and they don't say much because they don't know what to say. A couple days later, one of your co-workers stops to see you—the one who enjoys making fun of you because you're “different.” But this time the difference he sees in you forces him take a closer look at himself. He doesn't understand how you can be holding up so well. You aren't angry. You don't complain. A normal person would be visibly upset, but you seem to be at peace. And he wants to know—*he has to know*. Why?

That question gives you the opportunity you'd been patiently praying for. You tell him about God's promises to never leave or forsake His children, to hear and answer your prayers, to make everything—even the “bad things”—work out for your good. You paraphrase Paul and explain that your present sufferings aren't worth comparing with the glory that awaits you in heaven ([Rom. 8:18](#)). Your co-worker walks away, but he comes back the next day. The conversations continue, and as they do they get deeper. He eventually accepts your invitation to church and enrolls in the Bible Information Class, and few months later your smile is almost as big as his on the day of his confirmation.

That's one story. So, what's *your* story? Have you ever had an experience like that? Are you praying for an opportunity like that? You don't know when it'll happen. You don't know where it'll happen. But you have God's promise that He will bless every good work you do in His name. So, let your light shine! Let your light shine brightly in a sin-darkened world! **“Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven”!** Amen.