

You are the Salt of the Earth
Sermon for the 8th Sunday after Trinity
Sermon Text: Matthew 5:13-16



“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. ¹⁴ You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ In the same way, 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 fools had a great idea. They wanted to build a new town hall. So far so good... they just hadn’t thought about installing windows in the building. It was only when the roof was built that they suddenly noticed that it was pitch black in the building. After they had argued terribly and didn’t have an answer, the blacksmith thought he knew the answer: “Since light is like water,” he said with a furrowed brow, “the whole city must meet in front of the town hall and carry the light into the building with buckets!” The fairy-tale fools understood nothing. Of course, you can’t catch light and carry it somewhere else. Our Lord Jesus Christ used two very practical examples today that remind us not to be like the fools in a fairy-tale. In fact, we Christians are very similar to the previously mentioned fools if we would see our illuminating power and saltiness as being independent from Jesus. Then we have to look into our buckets, just like the fools, baffled to see nothing there but pitch black night in there! Unfortunately, there are more than enough examples of Christians claiming with great arrogance to all non-Christians that Christians are morally superior! But by asserting this, they were completely wrong and lived completely according to the pattern of the world – from their own power and from their own addiction to fame and honor. In any case, we should always tell ourselves and our non-Christian neighbors clearly that without Christ we are just as dark, forsaken by God, and sinful as they are! Whoever wants to shine, must be by the source of light and whoever wants to be salt of the earth must get their saltiness from Jesus. Without Jesus, we remain exactly as we are, without light or power for the world.

The problem that people continually have is that we neither accept nor want to be with this Jesus. “He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him” John writes about Jesus. (John 1:11) It would be even worse if we Christians, after being baptized into Jesus, were to go off on our own path. That’s what we would do if we were to steal the great gift that Jesus gives us and keep it only for ourselves. We would then be like the fools who wanted to hold light like water in buckets. That’s not possible! It also isn’t possible that we would hold onto the illuminating power that Jesus gives us and use it only for ourselves. Jesus knows this danger too and shows us this example of light and salt so that we understand where our power comes from. And above all, where it should go. Either we are light and then we obviously shine into the world, or we aren’t light and are just as dark as the world around us. There is no in-between. Just as there is no salt that is not salty in the end. Both parables show us that in Jesus, we are automatically there for the world. We must repeat that slowly and clearly over and over again. We as Christians and we as the church are not here for ourselves but for the world. And when we live as a congregation and church, we do so for the world. If God also gives us beautiful places in our cities in which we can worship, then these services are not just for us, but also for the people around us. We should spare no effort in helping them understand what it is all about so that the non-Christians could also experience something of the love and illuminating power of God. At this point, I need to take a closer look at my actions. How was I like salt

here in my community and in my environment? Could one recognize from my actions that I come from Jesus and His light? This is a valid question and I think every Christian faces the same sad realization again and again that we are not Christ. We aren't even like Him. Nevertheless, I think that the very examples Jesus gives us here want to protect us from despair. Salt and light are both elements that cannot and must not be on their own. A grain of salt doesn't bring spice into the soup. But the salt and light seen together and coming from Jesus, bring what Jesus calls salt of the earth and light of the world – this is what we can say of the church. I am always amazed at how small the group of disciples that Jesus gathered around Himself at that time was. They were supposed to be the salt and light of the world? And they were. As small as a pinch of salt, but powerful in their impact that the whole world benefited from it. This can only be because Jesus said: "You are the light of the world! You are the salt of the earth!" We are here because of these words from Jesus' mouth and from His word alone we are what we are. Unfortunately, it is exactly these well-meaning Christians who, as they interact with their non-Christian fellow human beings, forget this very thing. Sometimes we desperately want to be accepted by the world. Our focus is not on Christ and His Word but on the world and therefore we randomly and unconditionally follow every popular opinion that there is instead of listening to Jesus' Word. History shows us often enough how unreliable popular political opinions really are. This should not confuse us but strengthen us in it, so that we know clearly that it is Christ who is our Light and Salt. We listen to His Word, not the words and opinions that come from the world. Therefore, we draw our strength from Him and from no one else. Even if we constantly strive to learn the language of our fellow human beings and to speak clearly, our message remains the same one that the Lord Jesus Christ already told His disciples and no other, even when we find ourselves at odds with the popular opinions of the world at some points. Of course, this can be extremely difficult in some circumstances. Just as prophets of the Old Testament constantly reminded God of their weaknesses or inability to speak, we are constantly reminded of our own shortcomings. But Jesus still says it, like He said to His disciples back then and He now says to us: "You are what you are. Not because of yourselves, you silly fools, but because of Me!"

And sometimes, the miracle does happen that we are Christ-like. For my son, it is sometimes extremely embarrassing when people say to him, "You look like your father." For my son, it is embarrassing because he knows the faults of his father and would rather be himself... of course without the faults of his father. How wonderful it would be if someone saw us and recognized from us our heavenly source. "You look just like your Father!" Amen, so let it be. Amen!