

## **Fifth Sunday after Epiphany February 9 2020**

### **Matthew 5:13-20**

*You are the light of the world.*

Really, Jesus? Us?

I have to wonder. Because it seems to me there is so much darkness these days, a darkness that comes directly from us. Look at the way we talk to one another. The way we behave, even us, the church, your hands and feet in the world.

*You are the light of the world.*

Come on Jesus, you're coming back to this again? Okay, let's assume you're right and I/we are the light of the world. What can I do? One person. What light can I bring? What change can I make?

Yes, our confirmands spent time on Wednesday making Valentine's Cards for Veterans in the VA Hospital in Iowa City. Who knows what spark of light this may be in someone's day? A reminder that they are loved, that they are honored for their service, that they are worth paying attention to. That they have value as human beings.

Yeah, when I was at First Lutheran I did have those two High School students tell me about an encounter they had with a man sitting at the intersection near the Collins Road Hy-Vee. He sat there with his sign asking for help. They stopped, got out, and talked with him. They told him up front they didn't have anything to give him other than their time, their

attention, the dignity of being seen. And they heard his story. Of what had brought him to that place holding a sign asking for money for food.

The jaded among us would say he was probably telling them what they wanted to hear. I've been in this business enough to know that it happens and I've heard enough of them. But, does it really matter? Whether he was telling the truth or not, didn't the light of God shine upon him. The light shone in his darkness in the form of these two high school students and said he was worth stopping and listening to. And more often than not, just that has been what most folks want. To be seen and acknowledged as people.

*You are the light of the world.*

Okay Jesus, I'm beginning to get the idea. We are the light of the world. So now what?

*Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*

Okay, what are those good works? Are you talking about the Ten Commandments? Eating the right foods, praying in the right way? What?

After all, you call us to be more righteous than the scribes and the Pharisees. Man! That's a pretty high bar. What's that? Look later in the Gospel? Chapter 23?

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith." 23:23.

So, light isn't spread through detailed keeping of the Law, but by justice, mercy, and faith. What's that? Oh yeah, I remember what you answered when you were asked about which of the commandments were the greatest. To love God with all that we are- all our heart, all our soul, all our strength...and to love our neighbor as ourselves. I got that.

What? There's one more about love? Coming up in this Sermon on the Mount? I don't...

*Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.*

Seriously, Jesus? Love my enemies? The ones who are out to destroy everything I hold true? The ones who seem hell bent on...What's that? Yes, I know there was a National Prayer Breakfast this past week. The keynote speaker? Yeah, I'll look it up...

Arthur C. Brooks. He's a past president of the American Enterprise Institute, and recently joined the faculty of the Harvard Kennedy School and Harvard Business School. This is kind of cool, his most important criteria for speaking, he is "a follower of Jesus who taught us to love God and to love each other."

Yes, I see he talks about a darkness that has been cast across our nation. One that we all are guilty of contributing to. He calls this darkness contempt- which he defines as "the unsullied conviction of the worthlessness of another."

Wow. If you think about that Jesus, that's blasphemy. To think another is worthless directly contradicts the Father's own statement that all of creation

is good. That all are created in God's image. That takes guts to say God is wrong.

But I see it all too often in the way we talk to each other, Jesus. This contempt. I have to admit... it makes me tired. And sad. And mad. And hopeless. And it tempts me to do the same. To treat others as if they are worthless because of the politics they hold, the color of their skin, the wealth they have, the education they don't. And what's worse...sometimes I cave into this temptation and fall into this darkness of contempt for others. It's scary- kind of like the dark side of the force- because it feels so powerful, so good, so righteous...

*You are the light of the world.*

What's that? Look...I've just told you what I've done sometimes. And still you...

*You are the light of the world.*

Really?

*You are the light of the world.*

Yes, but how do I know... oh! Yeah! Baptism. Yes, I know it should have come to mind earlier, after all I've been asking folks to keep reminding themselves each day in January, "I am a baptized child of God, deserving of love and respect, and God will use me to change the world today."

*Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.*

Okay, but what can I do to shine against this darkness of contempt... the speech?

I see, he suggests asking God to give me the strength to do this hard thing. To love others, even my enemies. Even ask for the strength to fake it until it becomes real.

To find others to hold me accountable to do this.

What's this one? Wow- to go looking for contempt...just so I can answer it with love.

*You are the light of the world. Let your light so shine before others, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*

Okay Jesus, I hear you. But...I wonder if everyone else does. Especially, Levi, he's getting baptized today. A new spark in the world. A new source of your light to shine.

*You are the light of the world. Let your light so shine before others, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*

You don't give up, do you Jesus? No matter how hard we try and push you off. No matter how much we try and convince you we can't do it, we're not worth it. You just won't go away. Will you? You love us that much? Yeah, I guess you do. No, I know you do. Thanks, I guess I needed a little pick me up this week. Um, same time next week? Yeah? Yeah.

Siblings in Christ- You are the light of the world. So, let your light so shine before others, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.