

# A CITY SET ON A HILL

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Old Testament Lesson; Isaiah 58:5-9a

Psalm of the Day; Psalm 111

Epistle Lesson; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Sermon Text; Matthew 5:13-16

The text we are going to look at today is taken from Matthew, chapter five, verses 13-16. This is in our Savior's name.

You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its flavor, how will it become salty again? Then it is no good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled on by people. You are the light of the world. A city located on a hill cannot be hidden. People do not light a lamp and put it under a basket. No, they put it on a stand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. In the same way, let your light shine in people's presence, so that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in Heaven.

These are Your words, Heavenly Father. Lead us in the way of truth. Your Word is truth.

Amen

If I asked you to go to your spice cupboard right now, and pick out the spice that best represents you, what spice do you think you would pick out? Maybe some of you would say, *“You should pick out Cinnamon, because you are fun, and happy to be with.”*

Some of you might say, *“You should pick out that Lemon Zest,*

*because you are a pretty zesty person. You have zest for life.”*

Others of you may say, *“Maybe you should pick out Garlic, because you leave this nice aftertaste, wherever you go.”*

Others might say, *“You should probably pick out Cayenne, because you are like bigger than life, larger than life.”*

I am glad God has made us all differently, and there are a lot of different 'spices' in this room! But, there is one spice, one flavor that all of us in this room, as Christians, and God's people should have.

Jesus said, **“You”**, and He is talking to everyone of us,

**“You are the salt of the earth...”**

Now, here is a question for you. What does that salt taste like?

What is the flavor of the salt Jesus was talking about?

I am going to tell you, when it became, the moment where it became crystal clear to me, in my mind. It happened when I was thirteen years old. I happened to be way, way, **a long ways** from here in a suburb of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania called Gibsonia, Pennsylvania. I was in a little basement of a bank, along with about forty other people. And, there also was a guy there who came to give a presentation. He happened to be, *(at that time, in 1973)* the current pastor of Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Madison, Wisconsin. His name was George Orvick.

Let me tell you why he was there in the bank basement of this little place called Gibsonia, Pennsylvania. I belonged to what was called a little, mission congregation. We had started a mission, a little, Lutheran congregation, with only about forty people. And, we were what was called an Independent Congregation, because we did not belong to any synod. But, our little church wanted to join a synod. We wanted to be with a bunch of other congregations so we could have a seminary that we belonged to, a college that we were a part of, and foreign missions we were part of. And so, we had invited leaders from different synods to come, and present to this little group of forty people what it would be like, if we joined their synod. All

of the other synods sent some representatives. But, the only one who actually sent the president of the synod was this little synod called, ***“The Evangelical Lutheran Synod”***. And, so George Orvick, president of the synod, and also pastor of Holy Cross Lutheran Church, walked into this little, bank basement, where we had church.

You could not help but feel drawn to President Orvick, Pastor Orvick, because he had this winsome personality. He was kind, friendly, and showed a genuine interest in everyone there, including the kids who were in the room that evening. He said, *“I know you are thinking about joining a synod, and you are thinking through different synods. Let me tell you about the synod I happen to be president of, **The Evangelical Lutheran Synod**. I am going to walk you through those three words. Evangelical, Lutheran, and Synod.”* Then, he said this. This has stuck to me, until this day.

*“Evangelical. That is our flavor.”*

My ears perked up. I thought, *“What does he mean, 'That is our flavor?'”*

As a kid, I had heard the word *'evangelical'*, but I did not exactly know what it meant.

Actually, he walked up to a board, and wrote the word up on the board. ***'Evangelical'***.

He asked, *“What does the word 'evangelical' mean?”*

He underlined the word in the middle (angel), and said, *“Right in the middle of the word 'evangelical' you see a smaller word. It is the word 'angel'. The word 'angel' means 'messenger'. The prefix, 'ev', means 'good'. So, an 'evangelical' group of people is a group of people who have a 'good message'. The word 'evangel' means 'good news, good message'. We translate it from a Greek word in our Bible. It is translated in English as, 'Gospel', which means 'good news'.”*

So, he said, *“Our Evangelical Lutheran Synod is a group of people*

*who have the 'flavor' of good news. It is a good message. And, the good news is, even though we are all sinners, every one of us, and we deserve to be condemned forever, Jesus has died for our sins. They are all forgiven. They are washed away. God loves us dearly, for Christ's sake. That is our flavor. That is the message we talk about."*

*Then he said this. "And, that is the type of people we try to be. We try to be people who are '**evangelical**', who have been affected by that Gospel message, who understand the sacrifice Christ made for us, the love Christ has for us, the compassion Christ has for us, the patience Christ has with us. We try to live that. We try to reflect that by the way we live our lives. That is what it means to be '**evangelical**'. That is the 'flavor' we have."*

*I thought, "I want that 'flavor'. I want to be like that."*

At that time I was going to a high school that was a huge, big, public high school. I got a great education, but it was a rough high school. There were lots of drugs, fights, and very immoral behavior. I had never been exposed to a big group of people who had that '*flavor*' he was talking about.

And then, I went to Bethany Lutheran College, when I went to college. It was like I fell in to a vat of that '*flavor*' he was talking about. It was amazing. It did not matter whether the person was a professor, or the janitor, or the chef in the cafeteria. It was like almost everybody on that campus exuded this '*flavor*', this '*evangelical flavor*'. It was because they all knew Jesus. They all knew what He had done for them. They all trusted Him, as their Savior. They knew their sins were forgiven. It was this group of people, who by in large, were kind, loving, friendly, forgiving, and welcoming.

It was so amazing that it made me hungrier to learn more, and more about The Gospel, and about Jesus, because I saw what it had done to their lives.

I really believe that is a large part of, (*because I had no intention of being a pastor, but I have a huge feeling that was a large part*), what ultimately drew me to want to learn so much about Christ, that I ultimately became a pastor!

So, in The Bible, Jesus said,

**“You are the salt of the earth...”**

That is the *'flavor'*. That is why Jesus has put us here. He has put us here to have that *'flavor'*. Now you notice He says,

**“...if salt has lost its flavor...  
it is no good for anything...”**

Boy, I think about my own life, and I think, *“I know there are times, when I do not give that 'flavor' to people. I know there are times, when people can walk away from me, and I have left a 'bitter flavor in their mouth', or I have left a 'stinging flavor in their mouth', because of the way I had treated them. Or, maybe some people think I treat them 'blandly', as if I don't have any care, or concern for them.”*

We all understand that none of us are going to be perfect. We are not perfect at giving that *'flavor'* we have been called to give, which is all the more reason, all the more reason why we need to run right back, right back to Christ.

Then, what does He give us? He gives us that wonderful, greatest *'tasting'* thing in the world. He tells us our sins are forgiven. Even though it is a sin to not live the way we should, we are forgiven.

That just motivates us then, to be that type of people.

Additionally, Jesus says,

**“You are the light of the world.”**

In fact, here is what He says.

**“You are the light of the world. A city located on a hill cannot be hidden. People do not light a lamp, and put it under a basket. No, they put it on a stand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. In the same way, let your light shine in people's presence,**

**so that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in Heaven.”**

Now interestingly, Jesus says this about Himself. He says,

**“I am the Light of the world.”**

The Bible tells us Jesus was the Light that came into the darkness. So, Jesus is the ultimate light of the world. If you were here last Sunday, you heard a great sermon from Pastor Moldstad, about how we are born in to this dark world, because of the darkness of our sin. We are blind, and we need a Savior. And, Jesus is the Light. He is the true Light. He brings us into this wonderful light of knowing we have a Savior. Our sins are forgiven. He died for us. And, we are not afraid of standing in the very Light of the presence of God, because all of our sins are gone, and they are washed away.

So, Jesus says,

**“I am the Light.”**

Then He said,

**“You are the light...”**

**You are the light of the world.”**

In what sense? Well, He is like the sun, and we are like the moon. We don't generate the light. We don't create the light. Jesus is the Light. But, just like the moon reflects the light of the sun, you and I are here to reflect the Light of what Christ has done for us, by the way we live, by the way we act, by the way we talk. Whether that is at home, at work, at school, in the neighborhood,

**“You are the light of the world”,** Jesus said.

Now, I am going to show you something very interesting. Before I show you this, I am going to tell you something. I don't know if you have ever heard of man by the name Julian the Apostate. Back in the 360s AD, he was the most powerful person in the entire world. He happened to be the leader of the Roman Empire. He had been brought up as a Christian. But then, when he became the leader of the Roman Empire, he fell away from the Christian faith. That is

what it means to be an *'apostate'*. It is *'somebody who falls away from the Christian faith'*. He set as his goal to exterminate the Christian faith in the Roman Empire. He wanted to restore this religion of the false, Roman gods. So, that was his goal. He wanted to exterminate Christianity in the world, and he wanted to bring back this belief in false gods. He wrote a letter to the priests (of what we know as false, Roman gods). I am going to read part of this letter to you. It is very interesting what he says about Christians. Now, he is going to talk about *'them'*. When he talks about *'them'* he is talking about *'Christians'*. When he talks about *'us'*, he is talking about, well he was an unbeliever, so part of *'the unbelieving world'*. So, he is going to describe *'them'*, *'Christians'*, using some derogatory terms. *"These impious Christians not only feed their own people, but our people, also, welcoming them with their unconditional love. They attract our people, as children are attracted with cakes. While the pagan priests neglect the poor, the hated Christians devote themselves to works of charity. And, by a display of false compassion, they have made their foolish errors attractive, and effective."*

Now, listen to this.

*"Such practice is common among them, and causes contempt for our god."*

So, Julian Apostate looked at Christians, and said, *"Their lives are so attractive, the way they are kind, and friendly, loving, and giving. They take care of poor people. They are so attractive that they are leading people to follow Christ."*

You are the light of the world. Are you like that, or are you more like this?

There was once a young guy who walked out of church, when the sermon was over, and church was over. He looked troubled, when he shook the pastor's hand. He said, *"Pastor, can you please pray for me?"*

The pastor asked, *“Why? What do you want me to pray about?”*

The young man said, *“Well, this week, actually today, I am headed to camp, summer camp for a week. My mom and dad are sending me to a camp that is not a Christian camp. It is just going to be a bunch of unbelievers. Pastor, when they find out I am a Christian, I am worried about what is going to happen. So, Pastor, please pray for me.”*

So, that week the pastor prayed for the young man.

The next Sunday, after camp was over, the young man was in church, again. As he walked out of church, he had a big smile on his face. The pastor asked the young man, *“How did camp go?”*

The young man said, *“Great!”*

The pastor said, *“I have been praying for you. What made it great? You know, you were worried what they would do when they found out you were a Christian.”*

The young man said, *“Pastor, they never found out.”*

What about you? You see that is our sinful nature. *“I want to put this light under a bushel, because it can be scary to think, 'What will people do, if they find out I am a Christian?' 'What will they say?' 'Will they let me be part of the group?' 'What will happen to my job?' 'What will happen?'"*

We all recognize we have not been the light of the world that we should be. That is again exactly, exactly why The Gospel *'tastes'* so good to us, that *'flavor'* of The Gospel. I recognize that my life does not always reflect the love, the kindness, the patience, the goodness, the self-sacrificial heart Jesus had for us, when He went to the cross to pay for our sins. I know my life does not reflect that the way it should. But, that is exactly why I run to The Gospel, why you run to The Gospel. It *'tastes'* so good to know that regardless of that, Jesus has died for me. He forgives me. He washes away my sins. He sees me as if I have lived a perfect life. And, you too. The more, the more you are flooded with that Gospel message, the more it reflects



off of your own life, And so, we certainly pray we would all be that kind of people.

I am going to close by reading this. In 1968, our synod celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, our Golden Anniversary. There was a man who was asked to write a book about the history of the ELS, for its first fifty years. His name was Theodore Aaberg. Theodore Aaberg was the president of our seminary. He was an incredibly intelligent man. He was a great theologian. He was well looked up to by many, many people throughout the world, as a great theologian.

When I went to Bethany, he taught freshmen religion, and I had the privilege of attending his class. So, here was this great man. But, you would have never, ever thought this man was some great man who was highly looked up to, because he was as humble as they come. He was kind, loving, and gentle. He had that '*evangelical flavor*'.

I want you to hear what he wrote in the book about the history of the ELS. Guess what it's called.....

### ***A City Set on a Hill***

Jesus said, "*You are a city set on a hill. You are a light on a hill.*" Here is one of the closing paragraphs.

*"The Christian members of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod have been a light of the world, these past fifty years. Their history is rightly called, 'A City Set on a Hill'. There undoubtedly have been hypocrites in our membership. And, with every member there has been much that has not been right. And yet, for all of that, the membership of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod has been characterized by a people who have continued in Jesus' Word, who have sought to do God's Will, and have put their trust in the promises of God. This is the key to our synod's future. Let it be that the future is hidden, that it brings changes, that there is much to cause apprehension. There is still that which is as sure as God Himself has assured, namely His Word, His directive, His promises.*

*If the synod's membership can be characterized in the future, as it has been in the past, by a people, a people who continue in Jesus' Word, labor to do Jesus Will, commit all of their cause to Him, in confident trust, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (and I say also Holy Cross Lutheran Church) will, under God's help, continue to be what it has been in the past – a city set on a hill.”*

God grant that, for Jesus' sake.

Amen

Now, may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts, and our minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Amen.