

*Matthew 5:13-20*

<sup>13</sup> “You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. <sup>14</sup>

“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. <sup>15</sup> No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

<sup>17</sup> “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. <sup>18</sup> For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. <sup>19</sup> Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>20</sup> For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

*Matthew 5:13-20, 2017*

You are Salt and you are light.

I love it that this week our gospel lesson includes Matthew 5:16:

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

Last evening we heard those words as Elliot Joy Lysholm was baptized.

Little Elliot is a light to her mom and dad, her grandparents the rest of the family,

and was even to us last evening.

How can you resist the joy of having a new baby in your family or community.

There is nothing else that will make grown ups make the silliest noises, and act in the most childish ways,

or make the faces of everyone around light up with the joy of this new life.

I am not so sure we all might not want to go back to being a few months old ourselves;

the innocence, no worries, taken care of with love.

And yet, here we are, all grown up or grown old or whatever your case may be,

and you are still called on to be light;

let your light shine.

What is light?

That may seem like a silly question but think about it. The light most obvious to us is the light from the sun.

That light is energy first.

It is energy that gives warmth to the air and to our bodies.

It is energy that gives sight because when that energy comes into our world it is refracted and reflected causing the things around us to have color.

Light gives us the beauty of the world in all its color.

Light is energy that gives growth to plants and health to animals.

We can do amazing things with light technology now.

My brother and his wife are building a new home and they have some acreage where they are going to harvest trees.

In their barn they are setting up a grow facility where they will be growing their new trees from seedlings,

and they will use special grow lights and material that acts like prisms to emit just the right frequencies, or colors, of light the trees need to grow best.

And no, they aren't growing pot, they are growing real trees.

Once these trees are big enough they will be replanted outside to grow to full maturity.

Scientists have figured out what spectral ranges work best for different types of plants.

And from that same light we get much needed vitamin D.

When the sun's UV-B rays hit the skin, a reaction takes place that enables skin cells to manufacture vitamin D.

Light from the sun is important to our entire world.

There is another kind of light that is important also.

That is the light Jesus talks about in our gospel lesson.

You are the light of the world.

In some ways you are like the prism that reflects and refracts the light of God in this world to give warmth, sight, growth, health and life to others.

That is the role of a disciple as you bring God's love, grace, healing and presence into the lives of the people in this world you spend time with.

But in other ways you are the light, just as Jesus says.

Later on in the gospel of John, Jesus says,

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

There are ways that you are the light of Christ in this world.

Your presence as a part of the body of Christ, which you are through your baptism,

is the presence of Christ, the light of Christ shining into the dark places of this world to bring what is hidden into the light,

the suffering of God's people and creation due to illness, disease and pollution,

the injustices of our community and the world where oppression, violence, and terror reign.

In our Old Testament lesson for this week from Isaiah we get a glimpse of what this light we are supposed to be looking like.

We read there:

“If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday.”

The people of Israel are outwardly religious but lack righteousness.

There is a gap between their seeking God and seeking to know God's ways, and the lives they live.

They carry out all the religious rituals and practices and yet God doesn't notice

because they at the same time oppress their workers and they continually fight among themselves.

Isaiah is first saying that the life you live is the evidence of God's presence and influence in your life.

He is saying that when you are turned outward rather than inward, when you take care of others providing for their needs,

your light, God's light shining through you,

shines on the lives of others, your community and the world.

I have a friend whose wife had attempted suicide twice because of depression. She had been in counseling, in and out of institutions where she got help, but nothing seemed to work.

One night many years ago he called me up and asked me to come over right away because she had slipped into one of those places where the only alternative was to end her life.

Although this was the first time I had ever been asked to deal with this type of situation and felt grossly inadequate, I went. I went because I loved my friends.

And I went, believing that God would be with us and that somehow we would help her find a better place.

We spent the night talking, praying, reading scripture, telling life stories that needed to be taken out of the darkness where secrets are kept and shined the light of Christ on them.

By the time the sun came up and filled their house with light my friend's wife did find a better place.

As I went from there, and as I reflected on that night's events later on, I thought to myself,

“What a dark place someone must be in to believe that ending their life is the only way out.”

There are dark, dark places in this world. I haven't begun to describe the magnitude of them.

As baptized followers of Christ you cannot turn your eyes from those places and pretend they don't exist.

You are called to be the light that shines there.

The church is called to be the light that shines there.

You are the light of Christ in the world that draws others into the warm radiance of Christ's presence, love and grace.

This is your baptismal calling.

It is the calling your were baptized into and grew into as your faith, knowledge, understanding and discernment gave you gifts and abilities to share with others.

Last evening when I said to Elliot,

“let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

those words had meaning far beyond the joy she gave us,

or the light she brings to Brian and Roberta, to her family, and to all of us.

Elliot was be baptized into this same calling to be a growing light to her family, her friends, and as she grows to her community and the world

in very particular ways God will reveal throughout her lifetime.

In the meantime Brian and Roberta , like many of you did or are doing for your children, have made and will keep promises to bring her up in the church and faith, making sure of her instruction,

receiving the means of grace in Holy Communion,  
Eliot was being baptized into the death and resurrection of  
the light of the world who will be a light for her along the  
pathway of her life

a guide to where she should go,  
and the source of energy giving her warmth, sight,  
growth, health and life forever  
just as he has for you.