

Rev. Anthony T. Bertram

BLESSED TO BE BLESSINGS

Matthew 5:13-20; Epiphany 5A; February 7-8, 2026

Today's Gospel Reading begins with Jesus' familiar saying from the Sermon on the Mount, **"You are the salt of the earth."** This expression can be used to describe people who are trustworthy and reliable, the good sort of people we want as our neighbors. Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount with the Beatitudes, those **"Blessèd are"** sayings describing the blessings from God we receive as Christians. Then, as we heard in our Gospel today, He taught what it means for Christians, who are the blessed of God, to be blessings for those around them. The people of the Church, **"the salt of the earth,"** have something good to offer those around them.

Unfortunately, the traditional translation of the rest of the verse obscures what happens when salt does not do what God intends. **"You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?"** What has always confused and made no sense to me is the part that says, **"how shall its saltiness be restored?"** If salt is no longer salty there is no way to restore its saltiness.

There is actually another way to translate this phrase that is faithful to the Greek text. **"But if salt has lost its taste [literally "become moronic/foolish], how shall it [referring back to "the earth"] be salted?" "If salt has become foolish, how shall [the earth] be salted?"** This makes sense. If we, the Church, are the **salt of the earth**, but we do not function as salt, we will not season the earth, and we have lost our usefulness. This parallels the sense of the next statement by Jesus, **"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket (also something foolish), but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. 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."**

When both salt and light do what they are supposed to, something good is the result. When Christians are "salt" and "light" for the people of the earth, the good God works through us so that people come to faith in Him and glorify our heavenly Father with us.

Jesus is teaching how we Christians, the blessed of God, are to be blessings to the people around us, which builds on the mission and outreach emphasis of the season of Epiphany.

How do we bless others by being salt that seasons and light that enlightens those in the dark? This happens when others **“see [our] good works and give glory to [our] Father who is in heaven.”** Jesus notes that there is a difference between the good works of His disciples, Christians, and the good works of the scribes and Pharisees. **“Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”**

What’s the difference between the works of Christians and others? Only the good works done by faith in Jesus are righteous in God’s sight. The scribes and Pharisees rejected Jesus as the Christ, so their good works were not righteous. Faith in Jesus is the only way that our good works are righteous, which means they will exceed other good works by being the sort of good works God wants done often by us. In the words of Paul to the Romans, **“For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin”** (14:23b).

What does Jesus mean by “good works”? For Christians to do good works as “salt” they must also have light. For us to **“let [our] light shine before others, so that they may see [our] good works,”** we need to be in God’s light first by faith in Jesus. For us to be the **“light of the world,”** God’s Light in Christ must first shine upon us. This means that the light we shine is always a reflection of God’s light on us.

A Scripture all of us should keep in mind whenever the biblical concept of light comes up is Psalm 119:105, which is addressed to God: **“Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”** This verse seems to be on Jesus’ mind when He says, **“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 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. 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.”**

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God's Light shines on us in His house where we hear His Word. It shines on us when we read His Word from the Bible to ourselves or with others during family devotions with our spouse and children. God's light shines on us when the Holy Spirit brings His Word to our remembrance when we need it, the Word we have learned and memorized. There are many other ways God's Word comes to us. For us to be the **light of the world** to people around us, we must first have this light shine on us in Jesus Christ. And our light will shine forth from us like a city on a hill that cannot be hidden.

Our flight back home from vacation last week mostly took place at night. If you have ever flown at night, it's easy to spot cities and towns from the air. The same is true for driving at night. As we approach a city or town, the lights from that town lighten the sky around it and can be seen from a great distance.

This is how the light of God's Word should work in us. People should be able to spot us as Christians because they will hear God's Word from our mouths. God's Word will season our conversations with others like salt seasons the food we eat. How can we "salt" our conversations with God's Word?

When someone says something against God's Word which would lead us on a dark path away from God, we can confess what is true and right and refuse to go down that path or participate in that sin.

When someone comes to us with some troubles or questions or concerns, we have compassion for them and can bring God's light to bear on that situation or, at the very least, say we will search God's Word for God's guidance and pray for God's help in their time of trouble.

When we are struggling with weak faith and have fallen into temptation and sin, God's Word of law will shine into the darkness of our lives, showing our sins and need to repent. And God's Word of Gospel in Jesus will lighten our way back to God on the path of faith and forgiveness of sins.

These are the good works God blesses us to do as salt and light to people around us, the **righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees.**

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We, who have hungered and thirsted for righteousness in Christ (Mt 5:6), have been blessed by God, and we want to share our blessings with others, so they become the blessed of God. The good works we do are not righteous in themselves, but only in Christ. By grace Christ's righteousness has become our righteousness. The laws of God that we have broken and continue to break, Jesus has obeyed fulfilled down to the last **iota and dot**, the smallest letter and stroke of a pen. What we have failed to do, Jesus did for us. St. Peter wrote: **“Christ also suffered once for sins, the Righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit”** (1 Pt 3:18).

With Christ's righteousness as our own, we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Our **“light shines before others, so that they may see our good works and give glory to our Father who is in heaven.”** The Word of God that is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path we shine on those around us in word and deed, by what we say to them and do for them. God has brought us out of the darkness of sin and unbelief to live in His light. This is something we want everyone around us to share with us.

Many people in this world live very “bland lives” with diets unseasoned by God's salt. People living in the darkness of sin and unbelief need the Light of the Word of Christ to shine on them and bring them to repentance and faith in Jesus so they can live in God's light as light of the world. Jesus says, **“You are the light of the world... Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”**

About the last thing you will hear today in this Service is God's Word of blessing, which includes the phrase, **“The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you.”** Blessed of God, you are the salt of the earth and light of the world; you have something good to offer those around you. God's Light is shining from you so others can be brought into that Light, come to true faith in Jesus, and give glory to our Father in heaven. Amen.