

Rev. Lynne Ogren  
February 9, 2020

Zion Lutheran Church, Lewistown, MT  
5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany, Year A

Matthew 5:13-16

Let us pray. Grant us, O God, to hear your voice, and in hearing your voice to love your word, and in loving your word to do your will through Christ our Lord. Amen

“Why do we have to learn this?” Did you ever say that when you were in school? Kids, what are some subjects that you wonder if they will every be important for your life? *Accept responses.*

Most of us like to know the purpose for what others think should be important for us. Martin Luther understood that, and he wrote the Small Catechism using two important words over and over. In every explanation for the Ten Commandments Luther wrote, “We are to fear and love God, SO THAT...” So that we use [God’s] name in every time of need, so that we help and support [our neighbor], so that we come to [our neighbor’s] defense, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light.

These past few weeks we have been exploring the Faith Formation model that is depicted with the logo in your bulletin. With Christ at the center of our faith, we recognize that faith is formed in the context of respectful relationships and nurtured through spiritual practices. Now if I were to design a sermon series, I would go to guided learning next, but that’s not where we’ll focus our attention today.

Instead, our gospel leads us to the faith formation practice of Faith-filled Service. Today we will look at the “why” of our Guided Learning, which we’ll talk about next week. Today, we will see that what we do and learn together in Christian Community forms our faith SO THAT we are moved to engage in acts of Faith-filled service to the world.

In our gospel today Jesus is in the midst of his Sermon on the Mount. Last week he declared blessing upon those who are meek and those who extend God’s mercy and peace to others. And then he declares to his disciples who have gathered around him, “You are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world.”

In Judaism, salt was an element used in the making of a covenant. Our sacraments include an earthly element in partnership with God’s Word—water for baptism and bread and wine for Holy Communion. Perhaps because its preservative qualities God used the earthly element of salt in the making of a covenant as a sign of God’s promise to be God for the people of Israel forever.

The image of light is also used in covenant language. In Isaiah, chapter 42, the LORD says to Israel: “I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations.”

Now, Jesus is declaring that this covenant relationship is given to his disciples SO THAT they can serve as the living sign of God’s promises to the whole world. Those who know and follow Jesus serve as God’s salt and light, expressing God’s promise and commitment to be present and active in bringing life to all people.

We must also remember that according to our model, faith is formed in the doing of the service we are called to do. We may not feel prepared or qualified, but by engaging in acts of faith-filled service, our faith is strengthened, like a muscle after hard work.

We could spend time considering how we each participate in acts of faith-filled service, and perhaps you can include this reflection in your spiritual practices this week. As we think about our individual opportunities for faith-filled service, we are also called as a congregation, as a community of faithful people, to be salt and light for those around us.

Today we are lifting up Stephen Ministry, a ministry that does not belong only to those who are serving as our Stephen Leaders and Ministers. This is a ministry of our whole congregation. At this time, I'll invite some of our folks to tell how this ministry has been important to their lives and faith.

*Stephen Ministry highlight*

Zion Lutheran serves as salt and light in many other ways. As God's people we are all called to preserve life, to honor the covenant God has made with us and with the whole world, and to engage in acts of mercy and justice.

In lives that are active in faith-filled service, we share the faith that was born out of respectful relationships, nurtured in spiritual practices, and grown through guided learning, all of which is centered on our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Let us embrace the call of Jesus to be salt and light SO THAT God is glorified and the Good News of Jesus Christ is proclaimed to a world in need of God's love and grace.

Let us pray.

Almighty God, your Holy Spirit equips the church with a rich variety of gifts. Grant that we may use them to bear witness to Christ in lives that are built on faith and love. Make us ready to live the gospel and eager to do your will, so that we may share with all your church in the joys of eternal life; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

## **Prayers of Intercession**

Trusting that God hears us, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

*A brief silence.*

Holy God, it is your desire that all people might come to know you intimately. Lead our communities into deeper relationship with you. May your church radiate your righteousness to all whom we encounter. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

God of creation, you quench the dry ground, bringing water that sustains life. Satisfy the needs of all the earth, so that all living things bear witness to your verdant grace and continue to shout your praise. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

God of justice, you free us from the oppression that binds us and call us to serve one another. Liberate us from all fear, bigotry, and greed, and set our hearts and minds on love, equality, and justice. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

God of life, you raise up the lowly and comfort those in despair. We pray for those who are suffering in any way this day, especially...

Kathie, Jessie, Ed,

Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

God of all eternity, we give you thanks for the lives of the saints who have pointed us towards faithfulness in you. May we trust in your endless mercy and grace. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Confident that you are able to accomplish more than we even dare to ask, we bring these prayers before you, believing in your saving grace revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**