

The Festival of All Saints | St. Matthew 5:13-16
November 6, 2016 | Saude & Jerico Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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O eternal merciful God and Father, who made known to us Your holy Gospel, we humbly ask You, cause Your Word to bring forth in us abundant fruit, that we may daily grow in the knowledge of Your will, walk worthy of You unto all pleasing, and be made proper partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 175)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for this morning is taken from the fifth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew, beginning with the thirteenth verse. We read as follows in Jesus' name:

[Jesus said:] "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. 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." (ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Jn. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, whose "light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (Jn. 1:5), dear fellow redeemed:

It is quite a view to look at America from outer space, particularly at nighttime. The eastern half of the country is peppered with light, as is the west coast. You can tell from the concentrated circles of light where the larger cities are, and you get a sense of just how many people there are in our country.

In today's sermon text, Jesus says that His followers are "the light of the world." Imagine if believers in Christ actually glowed with light. How would that look from the night sky? Would the most concentrated number of believers be in America, or somewhere else in the world? How closely would the number of self-proclaimed Christians match up with the people of light?

When Jesus calls us "the light," of course He is not referring to a visible light, but to the faith that glows within us. Our faith is unseen. But our actions are seen by others. We give glory to God by living according to His Commandments. But we dishonor Him when we break His Commandments. This is why **Jesus Calls Us to Be the Holy Ones We Are**. We are already counted as righteous before God by faith in Him. But we also want to live holy lives so that more around us are drawn to the light of Christ.

A lot of emphasis is placed on being unique these days, on being your own person, no matter what crazy or deviant behavior this might include. But in reality, all people by nature are the exact same. They may look different on the outside, they may have different personalities, but they are no different on the inside. They are driven by sinful desires and walk in spiritual darkness. God describes this darkness as the world of *"orgies and drunkenness... sexual immorality and sensuality... quarreling and jealousy"* (Rom. 13:13). Spiritual darkness blinds sinners to what is good and holy, and it feeds hatred and all sorts of wickedness (1Jn. 2:9-11). Jesus said, *"And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed"* (Jn. 3:19-20).

Believers in Christ no longer walk in this spiritual darkness. They do not conform to the world, but are transformed by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 12:2). Some say this happens when a person opens his heart to Jesus and lets the light of God's grace shine in. But if we are lost in the darkness of our sin, there is no getting ourselves out. Our spiritual darkness is like being left alone in a pitch-black cave deep in the heart of the earth. Trying to escape this darkness through our own efforts ultimately makes us more lost and confused than we were before.

Only God can rescue a sinner from spiritual darkness, and He does it by the power of the Holy Spirit through the Word. 2 Corinthians 4 says that God *"has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"* (v. 6). Jesus came as a bright light into the dark world. His holiness and goodness were so blinding that many covered their eyes and would not see or listen to Him (Jn. 1:10-11). The devil convinced them that it would be better to remain in their self-righteousness than to repent of their sins and entrust themselves to Christ. But some did repent by the power of God and received Him by faith (v. 12). They were reborn into the kingdom of light.

You also have been blessed with spiritual rebirth. You *"were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God"* (v. 13). By the powerful working of the Holy Spirit, you were delivered from the dark womb of the world into the light of God's truth and grace. When you were baptized in God's holy name as a child or heard the saving Gospel later in life, the Lord *"called you out of darkness into his marvelous light"* (1Pe. 2:9). He changed the trajectory of your life and your future in the most dramatic way possible. You became His child by faith in Jesus and were made an heir of His eternal kingdom. God turned you *"from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to [Him],"* and He gave you *"forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith"* (Ac. 26:18).

All of this is because of what Jesus did for you. *"I have come into the world as light,"* He said, *"so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness"* (Jn. 12:46). In Jesus, you no longer have to fear what the devil may do to you or what will happen to you when you die. The guilt of your sin does not need to weigh you down anymore. You broke God's law by failing to perfectly love Him and your neighbor, but Jesus fulfilled it. He lived a holy life for your sake. He also destroyed the power that sin, death, and devil had over you by going to the cross as your Substitute and rising again from the dead in victory. This is why God now counts you among the saints, *"the holy ones."* By faith in Jesus, that is what you already are. But is that how you live?

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Probably the worst thing someone could say to us after knowing us for a few years is: “Oh, I had no idea you were a Christian!” We would have to wonder what we had said and done that made this such a surprise. Was it because of the way we lived, engaging in immoral and unethical behavior? Was it because of the language we used, including the frequent misuse of God’s name? Not that we have to give a personal testimony of our faith in Jesus to every stranger we meet. If you have met people like that, you know that this is a little awkward. But the people around us should notice something different about us, even if we do not talk about Jesus.

I suppose a person could say about this that they never signed up to be a “poster-child” for Christianity. “There are better people to talk about and represent Jesus than me,” they say. But God did not put someone else in their position in life with their particular experiences and acquaintances. He called that specific person to be His child and to live for Him. The Lord does not favor one Christian over another. He says to each one: You are salt, so be salt. You are light, so be light. Why? Jesus says, “[T]hat they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” Since God has chosen you as His child, He has chosen you to be His representative. He wants others to learn about His love through you. That is after all how you came to faith, through the example and testimony of someone else.

This is why it matters how you live your life. You want others to see what God has done for you, how His love has changed you, what His forgiveness has meant for your life, the sure hope you have of life after this one. But if the way you live and act is just the same as the unbelievers around you, what does this say? The Apostle Paul writes, “[F]or at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light” (Eph. 5:8). We feel the pressure of what Jesus asks of us. Sometimes we just want to fit in and live free of the law like non-Christians do. But this isn’t actually freedom. It is slavery to darkness where there can be no true hope or joy.

And yes, as a Christian, your actions will be closely watched by the people of the world. If they can catch you trying to pass the blame for your sin, or getting puffed up with pride, they will conclude that Christianity is just what they thought all along—a waste of time. But if they see your humble attitude and hear you repent of sin and offer forgiveness to others, they will be faced with something totally foreign to them, something strange—and yet something hopeful. It is at those times that they may ask you to tell them more about Jesus.

The history of the Christian Church is filled with weak and cowardly sinners, whom God called to be His holy ones. You are not the first one to wonder why God chose you, or how He could ever use someone like you for His good purposes. But sinners like you are just the instruments God wants to use to proclaim His saving Gospel. You are something the world needs because you have something the world needs. This is why Jesus calls you “*the light of the world.*” He has brought you and many others out of spiritual darkness, and has filled you with the light of His grace. When the light of your faith shines, it is the light of Jesus that people see.

None of us is really up for this responsibility that Jesus gives us, to be salt and light in the world, to be His representatives. But God knew what He was getting when He called us to be His own. He was not looking for “super saints” who already had their lives in good order. He

was looking for sinners, and He found us. We are the ones God loves. We are the ones He chose in His Son. We are the ones who live in the light of His salvation.

The world cannot see this light, and neither can we. But what we cannot see with our eyes, we know by faith. We know that we are not alone in this dark world, because there are many brothers and sisters in Christ around us. We also know that God keeps His promises. He promises to be with us and strengthen us in this life, and He promises to take us to live in His heavenly kingdom. Already, many saints have been translated in spirit to heaven, where they await the resurrection of their bodies on the Last Day.

It would be quite a sight to see God's children glowing with light on earth, if we could see this from the night sky. But imagine if we were able to look up and see the saints in heaven above. They would be countless like the stars. And one day you will *"share in the inheritance of the saints in light"* (Col. 1:12). You will be joined to that number by God's grace, and then you will be exactly what you are—holy in God's sight forever.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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