

Sunday, February 8, 2026

Epiphany 5A

Matthew 5:13-20

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

My friends,

Can you remember being on road trips as a kid?
My dad was always in a hurry to reach our destination.
I'd see a sign saying "viewpoint ahead."
There'd be a waterfall,
or a lookout over a valley.
And I'd ask if we could stop.
Especially if there was a waterfall.
Waterfalls were the height of nature.

But Dad always said no.

We had to get where we were going.
I told myself that when I grew up,
I'd stop for all the waterfalls.
I wouldn't miss the scenic views.

Fast forward to the future.

Now I'm Dad, driving the car on a road trip.
Do I want to stop?
No, I want to get where I'm going.
When I get there,
I don't have to drive anymore.
It will be over.
In horror, I realize something.

I've. Become. My. Father.

So I tried stopping at the viewpoints.

And yes, it technically takes longer.
But it **feels** shorter.
The whole trip is more peaceful.
(Unless you need to rescue
a kid trapped in a patch
of brittle prickly pear cacti.)

The time is more valuable.
The journey isn't something to rush through.
It's quality time.

1. The Road Trip

My friends,
we often get stuck in the grind.
 We fix our eyes on the next mile marker.
 We concentrate on the next obligation,
 the next thing we just have to get through.
 We focus on the soul-sucking little things.
 And we forget what the journey is actually about.

In today's Gospel, Jesus does not rush past the viewpoint.
 The road trip has barely begun,
 and He stops.

The kingdom of heaven has arrived.
 Jesus has been teaching
 and healing throughout Galilee.
 The sick are restored.
 The broken are made whole.
 Crowds gather, astonished by His words and works.

Imagine your life suddenly changed—
 blind eyes opened,
 lame legs strengthened,
 sins forgiven.
 Imagine leaving everything behind to follow Jesus.
 What does life look like now?
 Where is He taking us?

So Jesus goes up on the mountain and gathers His followers.
 Before the journey continues,
 He shows them the big picture.

Jesus answers two questions.
Who are we now that He is here?
And who is He?

In Him, you are salt and light.
And He is the One who fulfills the Law
He is God's righteousness for you.

From the mountain,
Jesus looks out over the world and says to His people,
You are the salt of the earth.
You are the light of the world.

2. Who Are You? Salt!

My friends,
Salt has the power to preserve.
In those days,
food would rot and decay without salt.

After Adam & Eve's rebellion in the Garden of Eden,
the earth itself was cursed.
Death reigned. (Romans 5:14)
Creation was subjected to futility.
The whole world is in bondage to decay. (Romans 8:18–25)

Life was filled with struggle and pain.
Human relationships were fractured.
Brother fought and killed brother.
People were scattered across the face of the earth.
And all creation groans.

And into this groaning and decay, God has come.
God Almighty has entered this world
as a descendant of Adam.
Bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh.
And He draws all people to Himself.

In Christ Jesus, we are "*the salt of the earth.*"

In His holy Church,

God actively preserves hope and righteousness
in a decaying world.

In His holy Church, God establishes a community.

It's a community that receives forgiveness.

It's a community that gives forgiveness.

It's a community that receives hope for the future.

It's a community that gives hope for the future.

All the sin, suffering, and death of this world
have not erased God's original intention.

Your lives preserve a remnant
of what Jesus originally desired.

Our congregation provides a refuge for the weary.

Comfort for the suffering.

You are the salt of the earth.

For all those fractured relationships,
all those people who are oppressed,
the poor,
the homeless,
the naked.

You are the salt of the earth.

The Church preserves a place in this world
where people are cared for.

You preserve a place,

a space,

where there is a community for the hurting.

You preserve a place

where the hope of the future can be seen.

Jesus looks at His gathered people on the mountain.

And He tells them that in following Him,

they preserve a vision.

It's a view of life as God desired it in this world.

3. Who Are You? Light!

My friends,
You are the light of the world.

You not only preserve the earth until its recreation.
You also give light the way.

*"You are the light of the world.
A city set on a hill cannot be hidden."* (Matthew 5:14)

The disciples could see this with their own eyes.
From that mountain,
they could see the Greek cities Hippos and Gadara.
Bright sunlight flashed
from the golden roofs of their temples.
At night, their lamps burned bright.
The silhouette of their buildings
stood out against the sky.
Those cities could not be hidden.

Neither can you.
You are the light of the world.

Notice what Jesus does **not** say.
He does **not** say, "Try to be light."
He says, "*You are.*"

His Word makes it so.

Jesus is the Light of the world.
And you are united to Him.
He shines in you.

*"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,'
has shone in our hearts
to give the light
of the knowledge
of the glory of God
in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Corinthians 4:6)*

*"The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not overcome it." (John 1:5)*

The Church does not shine among other lights.
She shines in the darkness.
She holds Christ crucified before the world.

This is the only light.
There is no other.
Jesus says,
*"I am the way,
and the truth,
and the life.
No one comes to the Father
except through Me." (John 14:6)*

The crucified Lord of glory cannot be hidden.
He cannot be overcome.
And He is with you.

By His blood,
you are children of God,
shining like stars
as you hold out
the Word of life. (Philippians 2:15b–16a)

So your lives shine by confessing Him.
Your words shine by confessing Him.
And people see and glorify the Father.

4. Who is Jesus? The One Who Fulfills God's Law.

My friends,
 For a moment,
 Jesus asks the crowds to stop and look.
 He offers them a scenic view of salt and light.

This vision is not new, however.
 This vision God laid down in the Law and the Prophets.
 He revealed it to Moses and His people, Israel.

In our Old Testament Reading,
 what does Isaiah reveal?
 What is God's design for His people?

*"...to loose the bonds of wickedness,
 to undo the straps of the yoke,
 to let the oppressed go free,
 and to break every yoke[.]
 ...to share your bread with the hungry
 and bring the homeless poor into your house;
 when you see the naked, to cover him...
 Then shall your light break forth like the dawn,
 and your healing shall spring up speedily;
 your righteousness shall go before you;
 the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard." (Isaiah 58:6–8.)*

Jesus assures us that
 He is not departing
 from God's Law and promises.
 Instead,
 Jesus is fulfilling
 God's Law and Promises.
 And He invites us
 to enter that fulfillment.

Jesus is the fulfillment of all God has promised.
Jesus is the fulfillment of all that God has demanded.
*"Do not think that I have come
to abolish the Law or the Prophets.
I have not come to abolish them
but to fulfill them."* (Matthew 5:17).

Where is the righteousness of God?
Where is the holiness God requires?
Where is the purity God seeks?
In Jesus Christ alone.

Jesus is righteousness for all God's people.
His righteousness is God's gift to all people.
A righteousness received by faith in Jesus alone.
Christ's death alone covers all of your sins.
His life reveals all of God's graciousness for you.
Jesus fulfills all the Law and Prophets.
His righteousness shines in you.
He shines with a righteousness
that even the Pharisees could not reach.

*

My friends,
I don't know where you are on the road.

For some, the way is joyful.
For others, it seems dark and winding.
You may feel lost.
You may feel alone.

You may be waiting for a new life to begin.
Maybe you are healing from what was broken.
Perhaps you are grieving someone who is gone.
Only God knows exactly where you are.

Today, Jesus says,
"Pull over for a moment.
I want to show you who you are.
You are salt.
You are light.

And who am I?
I'm the one who fulfills everything for you."

So stop.
Lift your eyes.
Let His Word shine in your heart,
so that you may
*'know the glory of God
seen in the face of Jesus Christ.'*

Then, with St. Paul,
you will see
that *"the sufferings of this present time
are not worth comparing with the glory
that is to be revealed in us."* (Romans 8:18)

Life may look dark.
But Christ shines in the darkness.

And as He shines through you,
your life is a small, shining witness to the world.
And the Father is glorified.

*May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ
Jesus. Amen.*