

Living in the Power of Blessing

5th Sunday after Epiphany; Series A

Matthew 5:13-20

What is the proper response when Jesus says something about you? The proper response is that you believe it (Dr. Jeffery Gibbs, Lectionary at Lunch, Mt 5:13-20, CSL, St. Louis, MO). Consider this list of things recorded in the Bible that happened simply because Jesus said something. He rebuked the winds and the waves while he and his disciples were trapped in a storm on the Sea of Galilee. He told them to be still and there was a great calm (Mt 8:23-7). He took five loaves, two fish, spoke a word of blessing upon them, and enough was produced to feed five thousand people (Mt 14:13-21). With words he instructed servants at a wine-less wedding to fill jars with water and present the new “water-turned-wine” vintage to the master of the feast (Jn 2:7-8). To a centurion soldier distraught over his paralyzed servant Jesus said this, “Go; let it be done for you as you have believed. And the servant was healed at that very moment” (Mt 8:13). To another paralyzed man Jesus said, “Rise, pick up your bed and go home. And the man rose and went home” (Mt 9:6-7). The four biblical Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, give us example after example of Jesus’ word performing and doing exactly what he says.

So what is the proper response when Jesus says something about you? You believe it. Jesus actually can do what he says. Jesus actually does do what he says. This is what God does. He makes good on his word. He walks his talk. He makes promises and keeps them.

Why is it important for us to be reminded of the truth this morning that Jesus makes promises and keeps them as our Lord, God in the flesh? It is important because it means he can be trusted and his words can be believed. It is important for us to be reminded this morning that Jesus can be trusted and his words believed because in our Gospel reading Jesus said something about you. That’s right; he said something about you, personally, as his disciple. Actually, he said a few things about you. In that section called the beatitudes of Jesus’ famous Sermon on the Mount he called you “blessed.” Not just once but nine times he called you blessed as one of his disciples (Mt 5:1-12). And on the heels of personally calling you and me “blessed” as his disciples, he says something else about us that we heard in our Gospel reading.

He says, “You are the salt of the earth” (Mt 5:13). As Jesus’ disciple you live in the power of his promised blessing as *salt*. Just as salt season and gives flavor to food and is useful for all kinds of things, so too you, as a disciple give flavor to the world and are used by God for all kinds of good. He said it and so you can believe it. When Jesus says something about you those words are meant for you to believe.

He also says, “You are the light of the world” (Mt 5:14). As Jesus’ disciple you also live in the power of his promised blessing as *light*. Jesus Christ is the light of the world. You are baptized into him and his name. You are “in the light.” He said it so you can believe it. When Jesus says something about you those words are meant for you to believe.

There is always the temptation to *not* believe Jesus when he tells you something about yourself. There is the temptation to treat Jesus’ words like an ordinary person’s words. The words of any other human being cannot always deliver on what they say or “walk the talk.” Any other human being cannot always make a promise and keep it. Only God can do

that. Only Jesus as God in the flesh can do that. But there might be the temptation for us sometimes to doubt Jesus' words and treat his promises with suspicion. There may be lots of pressure put on us from friends, family, co-workers, teachers, and the broader culture to be skeptical of believing what Jesus says about you.

It is dangerous, though, to not believe what Jesus says about you. As we learned in our Gospel reading, it is as dangerous as letting salt lose its saltiness. We might think that it is impossible for salt to lose its saltiness and become tasteless, for then it would not be salt anymore. Yet, in the ancient world it was common to add chemicals and other non-salt materials to pure salt making it possible for salt to be leached out of the mixture, leaving a tasteless substance (Gibbs, *Matthew*, 260). When such pure salt becomes tasteless it also becomes useless. It becomes thrown out and "trampled under people's feet," as Jesus says (5:13). The danger of not believing what Jesus says about you as a "salty" disciple is that you are no longer salt. You are no longer a disciple, counted as blessed before God and in a right relationship with him through Christ. If such a person is no longer right with God they are in a wrong status before God. It is dangerous not to believe what Jesus says about you as blessed "salty" disciple.

It is also dangerous not to believe what Jesus says about you as being the light of the world. If a person does not recognize something as light they might treat it wrongly. A person may not put the lighted lamp or candle in its proper place, on a dresser or nightstand or table, in order for it to give off light. Rather, if something is not recognized as light, it may be put in a place where it not only gives off no light, but also has the chance of being extinguished and losing its flame! This is dangerous. If a disciple no longer believes that he or she is light as God's baptized, blessed, chosen child, then that person may risk losing his or her identity as light altogether! It is dangerous not to believe what Jesus says about you as a blessed "lighted" disciple.

So how do we make certain that we live continually believing and trusting in what Jesus says about us as blessed salt and light as his disciples? Well, for starters, by recognizing that you do not make yourself blessed. You do not make yourself salt. You do not make yourself light. You do not force yourself to live in the power of God's blessing as "salt" and "light." It is a declaration that God declares and makes about you according to his Word of promise. It is a promise. God gives you an identity as blessed salt and light as a gift through his Son. Gifts are meant to be received and enjoyed. This gift cost him dearly but costs you nothing. It is God's treasure for you.

So you continually live believing and trusting in what Jesus says about you as a blessed salt and light by living as his baptized child. By being what you are and embracing your identity. We all identify ourselves in many ways—a father, a mother, a son, a daughter, a grandfather, a grandmother, a teacher, a banker, a construction worker, or a handyman. But what God says about you and your identity is most important. The 2014 Sochi Olympics just started a few days ago. I am sure there is great temptation for an Olympic athlete to let their sport define their identity. But what happens if they don't win a medal? What happens when they retire or don't make the next Olympics? What God says about you through his Son Jesus is most important. It gives meaning and shape and purpose to all of your other identities. What God says about you is absolutely true regardless of what anyone else says or thinks and regardless of retirement or a sickness or illness or a last place finish. God makes a promise to you. He calls you blessed. He calls you salt. He calls you light. So believe and trust in this promise he makes about you as his baptized child.

How can we share with others what Jesus says about them so that they come to believe it to be true? One thought that I have heard from another—share something true about God and true about our parish. We could share with people that our parish has the best parishioners and the best warm and welcoming atmosphere. We could also share this truth with others: “Our parish has the best promises!”

May God help us to live each day believing and trusting more firmly in his promise. May he help us share with others his promise to us that we are blessed and that we live in the power of his blessing as salt and light in this world. Amen.