

Text: Matthew 5:14-16

Theme: Be What Jesus has Called You to Be Everyday!

Date: February 5, 2017 (Epiphany 5A)

In the name of Jesus, the Light of the world, Dear Christian Friends,

A young man was being interviewed for a position in a small business firm. This young man showed up in a sharp suit and tie. That neat appearance made a good impression on the owner. The young man had also prepared an excellent resume in which he listed all the things he did at his church. As personal references, he gave his pastor, his Sunday School teacher, and a church elder. The owner of the business studied the resume for a few minutes and then he looked up at the young man and said, *"Son, I appreciate these recommendations from all your church friends. But what I would really like is a word from someone who knows you on the weekdays."* The young man hemmed and hawed a bit, said he'd see to it, and then got up and left. The owner never saw or heard from the young man again. Can you guess why? Just suppose for a moment that you are this young man. If you were to present a resume with personal references from those who know you on Sundays and those who know you on the weekdays, would those resumes send the same message or a different message?

Sad to say, too many times, there is a striking difference between the way a Christian behaves in church on Sunday morning and the way that same Christian behaves out there in the world during the week. This morning Jesus very much wants to talk to our hearts about the temptation to send mixed messages depending on which day of the week it is.

The words in the sermon text are from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount - Matthew 5-7. Like the rest of this sermon that Jesus preached on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, these verses are not intended to teach sinners how they are saved eternally. There are many other wonderful places in the Bible where God teaches us that Jesus has saved us from hell by winning the forgiveness of sins and eternal life for us by his perfect **life**, his innocent **death**, and his glorious **resurrection** from the dead. By God's Grace we believe and treasure this message. As baptized children of the heavenly Father we trust that we have God's sure and certain promise of eternal life in heaven. While these verses from Matthew 5 do not tell us how we are saved eternally, they do teach us how saved people live not just on Sunday, but on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday as well. That's the message that comes from our Savior's lips today: **"Be What God Has Called You to Be Every Day; Live Every Day As A Light!"** As we give our attention to God's Word today, Jesus the Light of the world, wants to impress upon our hearts these truths, 1) By God's grace we have and are lights, 2) By God's grace we shine as lights

1. By God's grace we have and are lights

What we were

If a complete resume were to be written about our life, it would have to mention that the first part of our lives was spent in darkness. From the time of our conception to our birth, of course, we were physically in the darkness our mother's womb. But the depth of our darkness was much more than the fact that our eyes were closed and the light of day never touched our baby soft skin. The most devastating truth about our darkness is that our life began in a state of deep and pervasive spiritual darkness. The Bible uses words like **darkness, blindness, and night**, to picture human spiritual ignorance, unbelief, and the dismal nature of death. These words accurately describe the way we were when conceived and born. The Psalmist writes, *"Surely I was sinful from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (51:5)*. In such a state of spiritual darkness we were ignorant of God's love for us, **dead** in our sins and **unable** as well as **unwilling** to live with God or for God. We did not know or understand the way to be different, that is, forgiven and appreciative of God and his plan for our lives.

What we have

But that situation has changed. God changed it! During this Epiphany time of the church year the words of the prophet Isaiah are often emphasized. The prophet writes, *"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned" (9:2)*. By nature we were counted among the people sitting and living in the darkness. Yet, as the prophet clearly says, the light of knowledge, of true faith, of life and joy has dawned on us. This came about when Jesus Christ came into this world and when the message of him came into our hearts and minds. Jesus brought spiritual **wisdom and knowledge, forgiveness and salvation, joy and newness of life**. Jesus himself said, *"I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness"* (Jn.12:46). The Apostle Paul echoed this words of Jesus when he wrote to the Corinthians, *"God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness" made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (4:6)*.

So by God's grace we have the light. And what we have came to us as a free gift. It first came to us through the Gospel. This good news of Jesus delivering us from the darkness of unbelief and sin touched our lives in Baptism and the Word. The light of the Gospel still by God's grace shines in our lives every time we hear and read and listen to the good news that our eternal salvation is entirely God's doing in Christ Jesus. No longer do we need to stumble around in life, spiritually groping for what is right rather than wrong, wise rather than foolish, kind rather than cruel. Let our spiritual resume record this truth: **we were once**

totally in darkness, but now we have light and enjoy light in Christ. But there is more: having the light of God's grace in Word and Sacrament means that we are the light.

What we are

The Apostle Paul writes to the Ephesians, *"You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord"* (5:8). This passage tells us more than that we used to be in darkness and now we have light. Paul says that we used to be darkness but now are light. There's a big difference. Just having light implies, *"I know I have light but I have no motivation to use it."* When Jesus says in our text: **YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD** he is instructing us that we not only possess light but that we are motivated to use it for the benefit of others. Have been exposed to Christ, the ultimate Light of the world, and linked to him in saving faith, we become lights that are equipped and capable of shining and giving light to others. The privilege to share this borrowed light or reflect the greater light is a gift from God's amazing grace, one that stems from the Holy Spirit's work through the gospel in our lives.

When the knowledge and spiritual understanding of the fact that we, who once were living in darkness but now are living in the light of faith, touches our lives, then the words of Jesus give us meaningful purpose to each new day of his grace. Jesus puts it this way. **YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD. A CITY ON A HILL CANNOT BE HIDDEN. NEITHER DO PEOPLE LIGHT A LAMP AND PUT IT UNDER A BOWL. INSTEAD THEY PUT IT ON ITS STAND, AND IT GIVES LIGHT TO EVERYONE IN THE HOUSE.** Living as lights not only means that we have and are light, it also means that we don't hide that light but rather we shine that light for others.

2. By God's grace we shine as lights

We shine by talking about Jesus

How? Jesus says in our text: **LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE BEFORE MEN THAT THEY MAY SEE YOUR GOOD DEEDS AND PRAISE YOUR FATHER IN HEAVEN.** God is quick to teach and show us what is involved in letting our light shine before people. Perhaps the first thing that comes to mind when we hear these words of Jesus is that of teaching, guiding or imparting correct information. How many times aren't we urged and instructed to inform others about the universal problem of sin and the solution provided by Christ? It is our ongoing task to share the truth, to combat error, give information to dispel spiritual ignorance, and offer hope to scatter the clouds of despair. We have learned from personal experience the truth stated in Psalm 119 that God's Word is a *lamp* to our feet and a *light* to our path as we make our way through life. So that others might enjoy the same reliable guidance as to what to believe and how to behave, we share God's Word with them. **Let us shine by talking to people, telling them about Jesus. So who is seeing the light of Jesus through your words? Who are you talking to about your church, your Lutheran Elementary School, your Christian High School – WLA?**

We shine by walking in the light

Shining as light involves more than words, of course. Lifestyle and conduct are included in the Light of Jesus. In his letter to the Ephesians the Apostle Paul writes, *"Be imitators of God."* In other words let the light of the Gospel shine through you as you imitate the real light of the world. People are watching for the light. What will they see shining through us? What do others see shining through us when we speak, when we vacation, or when we go to the grocery store or when we eat out at a restaurant? Do they see us digging into our food without a prayer of thanksgiving? Or do they witness our gratitude to the Lord for his goodness? People are watching for the light. Do others hear us speak words of encouragement or do they hear us grumbling and complaining and gossiping about others. People are watching for the light when they see us using alcoholic beverages, when they read what we post on social media, and when they observe what choices we make with our entertainment. People are watching for the light. Is your light, is my light, hidden under a bushel basket? It's a question we need to ask ourselves every day. How brightly is the Light of Jesus, the light of God-given faith, shining through us? What do the resumes of our life reveal about days of our week between the Sundays?

We shine by being filled with the Light

In his first letter to Thessalonians the Apostle Paul writes, *"You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then . . . let us be alert and self-controlled . . . Since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and hope of salvation as a helmet."* To grow in our Christian faith, love, and hope is a large part of shining brightly in this world. Serving ourselves with Word and Sacrament is the key to serving others. If we are to keep fully charge with the light of Jesus we need to stay connected to Jesus. We shine as light for others by being filled with the light ourselves. One way to be filled with the Light of Jesus is through regular worship attendance in church. Every week in worship God's message of love and forgiveness in Christ is shared with God's people. Each week many are blessed with this light. But, each week, many make other choices. Those not being blessed are sometimes your friends, your family; speak to them in love about the importance of being filled with the light of Jesus love. And Yes, sometimes that are us. Part of shining as lights is encouraging others to be filled with the light of Jesus by your presence in God's house. You are a spiritual encourager, you are a light, when you are here. When you are not here, your light is hidden under a bushel basket and not serving as a spiritual encourager. For whom has God made you a light? Every day, all year long, we have the privilege and opportunity to live as children of light, sons and daughters of the Heavenly Father. May God's Spirit give us the grace to **Be What God Has Called Us to be Every Day.** Amen