

“BE MORE OBVIOUS!”

A Sermon for the Fifth Sunday after Epiphany, February 5, 2017
The Commissioning of Stephen Ministers for Bethlehem Lutheran Church
Text: Matthew 5:13-16

We heard part of the Sermon on the Mount last Sunday. We heard that God blesses us in Christ even when we are most vulnerable. When we are low. When we are meek. When we suffer loss. Then God takes us and raises us up.

It's how God is. Jesus demonstrated that all the time. It was fascinating for people to watch. They were used to the opposite dynamic: “The powerful get more powerful, and the weak get weaker.” They lived in a “dog eat dog” environment.

Jesus said, “God is not like that.” The prophet told us Jesus would not be like that. He said “A bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench.” Sure enough, Jesus was a magnet for hurt people, no matter what their hurt was. He put a splint on a bruised reed, he put fuel in dimly burning lamps.

Jesus never quit working. He took care of everyone in Galilee, then Samaria, then Judea, anyone who was willing to receive him. Then he started in on the rest of the world. To do that he created the church. He put the same Spirit in the church that was in him. The spirit which does not break bruised reeds or quench dimly burning wicks. The Holy Spirit.

That Spirit fills the church because it fills the people who compose the church. We go around not breaking bruised reeds, etc. We throw ourselves headlong into the “care and redemption of all” God has made. That's our distinctive trait. It's who we are. Our genius. Our saltiness.

Jesus made an interesting comment about salt. He said that its worth lies in its special characteristic. Which, by the way, is not that it tastes good! On the

contrary, salt tastes good to us because we absolutely need it. To live. To survive. We need it for our body.

But we also need it for the economy. Salt made it possible in the old days to connect little villages into a world. Because of salt, one village could make fish and exchange it far away for the other things they needed, like cloth. Some people fished, some made cloth, some raised sheep, some made tools of iron. Fundamental to turning little communities into a worldwide web was . . . salt. This is what you could call “the salt of the earth.” The world needed salt. The ability of salt to share its gift of food preservation with people enabled people to share their gifts of food with others, and so on.

That amazing gift of salt, Jesus said, is what makes salt “salt.”

And he said to his disciples, to the ones who would carry on for him, you are that. Preserving, sharing, healing, giving, helping, uniting, enabling . . . that is what you are for the world.

So, be obvious about that. Share the peculiar gifts you have, for the sake of the unity and peace of the world. Don't hide your light under a bushel basket, so to speak. Don't hide your village, build it on top of the mountain. Be obvious. And those who need what you have in you will give glory to your Father in heaven, who created you in Christ to be this way.

Stephen Ministry is an attempt to make us all more obvious about the character of our God, by encouraging one another in every circumstance. We are salt . . . let's be more obvious about it. We are light . . . let's not hide it. We have a gift: the Spirit of

encouragement given us by Jesus Christ. Let's share it.

Bethlehem has been blessed with people willing to undergo training and eager to be more intentional than ever about being who we all are blessed to be—brothers and sisters in Christ who bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. We do it already; well, we are going to up our game just a little. I am thankful to God for their interest, their caring, their generosity and kindness. It is not as though something new has appeared in the skies over us. Rather, what is already true in us will be given new scope in our life together.

"Be more obviously God's people," the prophet Isaiah said to Israel. "Remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of finger, the speaking of evil; offer food to the hungry; satisfy the needs of the afflicted. Make it obvious to the world, light it shine to the world, that I am your God."

"Be more obviously God's people," Paul said to the Corinthians. "Let people know that the mystery of God has nothing to do with bullying or showing off—it is shaped like the love of Christ, who gave himself on the cross for others. Let that mystery out, by the Spirit!"

"Be more obviously my brothers and sisters," Jesus appeals to us today, and God will be glorified."

Amen.

