**Epiphany 5A2**

**February 5th, 2017**

**Theme: Game Changers!**

## Isaiah 59:3-9English Standard Version (ESV)

## I Corinthians 2:1-5

**Proclaiming Christ Crucified**

2 And I, when I came to you, brothers,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=I+Corinthians+2%3A+1-16&version=ESV#fen-ESV-28379a)] did not come proclaiming to you the testimony[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=I+Corinthians+2%3A+1-16&version=ESV#fen-ESV-28379b)] of God with lofty speech or wisdom. 2For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 3And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, 4and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=I+Corinthians+2%3A+1-16&version=ESV#fen-ESV-28383c)] but in the power of God.

## Matthew 5:13-20English Standard Version (ESV)

**Salt and Light**

13“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.

14“You are the light of the world…15Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%205%3A13-20&version=ESV;MSG#fen-ESV-23251a)] they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

### Matthew 5:13-20The Message (MSG)

**Salt and Light**

13“Let me tell you why you are here. You’re here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You’ve lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage.

14-16“Here’s another way to put it: You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don’t think I’m going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I’m putting you on a light stand. Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.

Game Changer

Today is the Super Bowl.

Two teams who happened to have the right group of players, who happened to have the right strategy for their game today, who happened to have a coach who has studied the heights and the depths of both teams and knows what to do might be the difference.

Both teams being nearly equal because after all they both ascended to this position through a 16 game season, and a number of playoff games it could come down to this: what player or two players are going to be the difference, the Game Changer?

For the 1970 Kansas City Chiefs, the game changer was two players. And it was one play between the quarterback and the wide receiver. The game had gone on and on and one and both teams seemed so close; and they probably were. One quarterback seemed to have greater fan following. He had a catchy name; and he played for the NFC team.

But the other quarterback had just as much if not more experience.

And the coach called one play. It was like a fake running play where it seemed the whole offensive line and all the other players were headed down the left side of the field. The defenders bit and tried to fend off the blockers on the other side of the line; and they were moving and defending the right side of the turf.

But noticeably the quarterback who had faked a handoff to the good running back backed up one or two steps and then lofted a long pass down the right sideline of the field.

The receiver caught it over the hands of the defender and headed toward the goal line.

It was that moment for that play with that quarterback and that receiver. Both have been inducted into the Football Hall of Fame. It was that play that won the game. It was that play that most likely put those two players on the Hall of Fame ballot; and got them into the Hall of Fame.

Both were game changers. Will we watch the game today; and will there come a time when we will say, that player or those players were the changers of the game?

**God is the ultimate game changer.**

He created the world with His Words.

And God said, “Let there be **light**,” and there was **light**.

Remember that. Remember the Creation of the Universe and the world. When God said **“Let there be light”** it happened. As Genesis says, **“And there was light.”**

When Jesus began His ministry as recorded by Matthew, He too is the ultimate game changer. He comes in the flesh. He comes to reverse the normal patterns of life regarding sickness, death, demonic possession; and of course the bringer of God’s love to bear all over everywhere. He dies on the Cross wearing and bearing our sin. He is raised from the dead to reverse the normal dark courses of events on this planet since sin entered in. And He did.

And He ascended into heaven. But just before He goes He tells his believers and followers that they will face trials and temptations and persecution but they are to take heart because He has overcome the world.

And he sends us the Holy Spirit who is meant to be our ultimate game changing counsel and advocate in this life as we try to course our way through life’s great and also terrible hurdles.

Last week we talked about the Beatitudes from the first part of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. The beatitudes begin with a formula. Jesus says, **“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”**

Each beatitude begins withthe words **“Blessed are…”** And then the second phrase says what God pours out on His people. **“Blessed are…the poor in spirit…for theirs is…the kingdom of heaven.”**

Jesus gives commands to His followers. These commands give direction about how to live your life following Him. He challenges us to **“turn the other cheek.”** He challenges us to love our enemy nod forgive those who do us wrong and act with the purest of motives.

And in the next section of chapter 5 of Matthew we see that He calls upon His followers to be godly; and be a godly influence on those around them.

And these words along with our Jesus’ words for today are tough directives.
Hear Jesus words to us: **"You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.”**

**Real Salt**

Sodium Chloride is what we call table salt. Morton’s salt is a common brand at the grocery store. And when we take it home and use it, that salt is a pure salt.

But the Morton Salt Co. did not exist back in the first century.

In Jesus’ day, salt was mined. It was mined from a quarry or a pit. And that salt that was dug up and ground into a usable size was never completely pure like what we get at the grocery store.

Sure, it was used as a flavor changer and a preservative much like we use it.

But sometimes, when they dug up the salt the salt they dug up was not pure. It lacked enough saltiness; and might not be salty at all even though it appeared to be salt.  When that happened they would cast it out the door to harden the pathway that led to their home. **"It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot." Get it?**

**Salty are you?**

**People of good and meaningful influence** are who Jesus calls His followers to be. They are called to be a usable salt not salt without saltiness. They are called to be uncompromised and genuine, undiluted and pure.

When Jesus says: **"You are the salt of the earth."** He is not saying you should be the salt of the earth...OR you could be the salt of the earth.

**He is stating a fact**.

In other words what Jesus is saying is this: “**You** (who follow me by faith) **are salt…”** And wherever you go you are salt. And your saltiness is meant to be evident to all those around you.

**“You are the light of the world.”**

He is not saying that you should be the light of the world. He is saying that right now, as believer and follower of Me, you ARE the light of the world. This is not a future thing. This is not something that Jesus followers are to grow into. This is not who you are after taking 7 seminars on Jesus; and then you are this. This is right now. You are the light of the world.

When we welcome the Lord into our head our heart our soul and indeed our whole being, we are the light of the world. When we welcome the Lord Jesus in our whole being we are the salt of the earth.

We are now the light of the world.

We are now the salt of the earth.

And as such you are very tasty.

And as such you are very lit up.

**Next**

The only choice that we have since **YOU** (plural) **ARE** salt…is this one: The only choice is what kind of salt you will be.

 **You are useless if you are not salty!**

If you were to go into a part of the world where they had quarries or big holes in the ground to get salt you could also see something else. It was not uncommon in the areas of Syria or Palestine to see grains of salt scattered on the ground.

That’s a salt that is no good. It was useless. It did not have the standard of saltiness so that it would be used in cooking or preserving. It lacks flavor. That salt is cast out on the ground and walked on.

We are those who have received God’s abundant grace to come to faith, to find out what following the Lord is all about, growing in what it means to be salt and light and wear and bear that grace where we are.

We do not see and receive this kind of grace in the places we work. We are to do the job; and if we don’t someone else will take our place. Even disagreeing with a boss who welcomes our response can be an iffy step for us.

This is a big one: how do we, how do you, how do I manage the grace of God as bearers of light and as bearers of salt in our family interactions?

*Peanuts Cartoon*

 *“A Peanuts cartoon, showed Peppermint Patty talking to Charlie Brown.*

*She said, "Guess what, Chuck. The first day of school, and I got sent to the principal’s office. It was your fault, Chuck."*

*He said, "My fault? How could it be my fault? Why do you say everything is my fault?"*

*She said, "You’re my friend, aren’t you, Chuck? You should have been a better influence on me."*

While Peppermint Patty was really just seeking to pass the buck; however in perhaps a very miniscule way she was in a real sense right.

We can be a good influence on others. No matter what we are an influence for good and for not so good.

If there is any location that will reveal what we really believe as believers and followers of the Lord it is in our house, behind closed doors with the ones whom we say we love-our family members.

We are and can be game changers in the home.

Are we tasty salt bearers there?

Are we the light of the world there?

Do our family members know that?

 Forget the world for a moment. Are we full of light in the home?

Do your adult kids know the beauty of the salt and the light in you?

Yes, you probably have let them down. When you live in a commune called home, you will blurt out bad words; you will selfishly shout, you will try to control every move for a period of time, you will fall apart, and cry and be hurt.

Right then and there, are you how God’s gracious presence in grace made you to be?

And even if these tough times and moments and arguments hit the wall, how are you able to take a deep breath and convert that dark moment into a God moment. “I’m sorry!” “I let myself down and the Lord down and it was not the way to be with you.” “Now, can we see how to remake, redo and reconstruct our differences?”

Simply declaring “Oh, how I love Jesus because he first loved me.” is a means of avoidance and not being tasty or lit up. And walking off, is not the way toward mediation and resolution, the solving of a difference.

If your family, your friends, your loved ones are worth it; and we assume they are, then stick with it, get down with it, work on it, it may be one of the better times in your life when you were able to work out things together with the Lord and the Holy Spirit guiding our reconciliation with one another.

**If you are one of those people who just walks away** and doesn’t talk, and has not dealt with hard or harsh disagreements; and you haven’t talked with them since; and you still love the Lord, I think that there might still be a crack, an opening, to go to the others and admit your weakness, tell them you are sorry for saying or doing what you did; and propose that, as salt, we try to get back together, again.

**Maybe that won’t work.** But you have been salt in a situation in which you were not salt. But you have been a light when you extended darkness and not light. And that is not forgotten. And maybe that does open the crack into an open door of change for the both of you.

Now if we are who God makes us to be, real salty salt then what example does Jesus give to us?

If you remember, last week we heard Jesus say the “Blessed Ares…”

And the Blessed Ares are those who have a healthy sense of humility and they are humble.

The Blessed Ares are those who do mourn but who are comforted by God. The Blessed Ares are those who thirst and hunger for doing what is godly on the face of the earth.

The Blessed Ares are those who have a good sense of mercy and how and when to give it.

The Blessed Ares are those who get their purity from the Almighty and apply it to their lives.

The Blessed Ares are people who want to move toward peace with others despite the depth of their anxiety and hurt.

The Blessed Ares are those who are looked down upon and cajoled for their stance in life which comes from faith which comes from God.

**Salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. 12The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.** Romans 13: 11b-12

**We can be game changers meaning life changers for others.**

We can make a difference for others. We can pray. We can say. We can love. We can care. We can give hope that goes far beyond the ceiling surrounding earth. I love that. I know I made that statement but I absolutely believe it.

We can give a hope that goes far above a sidewalk, far beyond who I am and what I am wearing this day, far beyond the tree branches, and farther than the last space shuttle ventured. We have a hope that goes beyond all that we can see, all that we can explore, all that we can dive down to.

We can give a plausible palpable hope that is forever and can be grasped by every mind, body and soul on the face of the earth.

And we with Jesus in us can give that free gift of God’s gracious love and forgiveness and the overcoming of addiction to those around us so that they can also be salt grains and light bulbs, tasty and lit up.

Salt and light were both precious commodities in Jesus’ time.

Both sustain life. Neither can be produced easily on one’s own.

***Kim felt like he was the only Christian teacher*** *on the elementary school staff at the school where he taught.*

*At his school the disregard for Christianity was subtle. Kim felt like a small light in a vast darkness.*

*How could he present the school Christmas musical in the framework of “not wanting to offend anyone” and “showing respect for all religious views without compromising his faith and commitment to God?”*

*The feature song of the program he chose was about the star that led the wise men to a Savior. And the clear Christian message of the song sowed some seeds.*

*As he and a fellow teacher talked later, Kim was able to share his faith.*

*Little did he know that this teacher would not live long. Six months have Kim and the other teacher talked about faith in Jesus the other teacher was killed in a car accident. God uses His people to impact their coworkers. P.105, the Man God Uses Prayer Journal, Blackaby*

**Bushel have you… are you?**

The bushel imagery is a good implement Jesus uses to make a point.

There are not many bushel baskets these days. They used to be made out of wood. We used to use them to collect the leaves after raking them and putting them in a trash barrel. We used to use them to collect all sorts of things like pine cones and apples from trees, to carry weed pullers and yard gloves.

Remember bushel basket.

Now, then, if we are light of the Lord and we put a bushel basket on our head what happens? The light is obscured. There is light but most of it is hidden. And most will not see it.

And many will not be able to comprehend that we are a light of the Lord.

So in life what is the bushel that you put over yourself to obscure that you are a light of the Lord?

Is there shyness? God gives you a word; and you hold yourself back from sharing a valuable insight from the Kingdom?

Have you a fear that you will be found out?

We don’t wear yamulkas. We don’t wear birkas. We are just who we are, humans who love Jesus. And when that comes out people think we are either holy rollers or Bible thumpers. We are neighter. We are humans who love Jesus, we are given His light, and we are called to shine that light and we are given saltiness and we are called to be salty wherever we go.

Finally, we are certainly not to cover our lit up ways nor our salty ways with a bushel basket to obscure who we are.

Can I say this? Can I really say this? Yes, I think it is necessary. OK, then I will say it.

It is my belief regarding our church and our congregation and our kind of people that we should bust out of anything that we think we are and be real, be genuine, wear no façade, put on no happy face if we are not happy, put on a face of mourning if that is what we are, put on the joy of the Lord if that is what we are.

Personally, I think this: a great huddle of people who believe in Jesus and are genuine about what they believe; and they actually express their love for one another in accord with godly love, not put on false fake “I’m a nice believer love-Godly genuine love.

And we are called too to have Godly genuine worship.

And we are called to have Godly genuine songs and singing and praises and prayers and have that real great hope.

If we have a bump in the road of our community life here we are to lovingly work through effectively what our bump is and take that bump down together.

A bump of disagreement about a subject is not meant to be a bushel basket that covers each of our individual faith lights that we carry inside us out to our environment out there.

Fake, made-up, disingenuous, false, wearing a mask of Jesus to cover-up our badness, fake caring, throwing dollars at some cause that we do not believe is truly real and good is not being genuine. It is not being you and It is not being us. And those things become bushel baskets that hide the genuine which is we are sinners, we are at times hurtful and hateful, we are at times disingenuous-we do not do what we really believe deeply.

And then, that is not healthy for those around us in our personal environment to see. We lack luster. We lack the salty brine that can change others’ lives.

Or perhaps the bushel is the self-absorption of internal conflicts. While conflict is an expected part of any human organization, when conflict becomes an excuse for unproductive institutional self-absorption, then it is a bushel that prevents our light from shining.

 The good news is that Jesus has already opened the Kingdom of God to everyone, regardless of who is righteous or deserving. Bushel-free, our lives shine with good news of Jesus, welcoming the lost from death to life, from shame to forgiveness, from wandering in an alien land to coming home to God’s very life.

**A mission pastor was meeting with a small group of Laotian Christian immigrants** in their house church. And salt and light were what they were discussing. The Laotian Christians told him that in their home country they soaked the bamboo in salt.

After the salt had penetrated the bamboo, it was then possible to mold and shape it. The Laotian believers boldly exclaimed to the mission pastor that as Christians, they intended to be the salt that made it possible to shape the direction of their new country.

Our nation, America, is in desperate need of those who can stand in the gap and prevent its destruction from within each citizen from within each state, from within our country to the world.

 As Eugene Peterson puts it in The Message translation of Matthew 5:15-16, ***“Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.”*** So live the tasty, lit-up life!

Do whatever you can to be salted up and tasty.

Be whoever you can to be lit-up and enlightening others.

Peace and Joy in the Lord,

Amen.