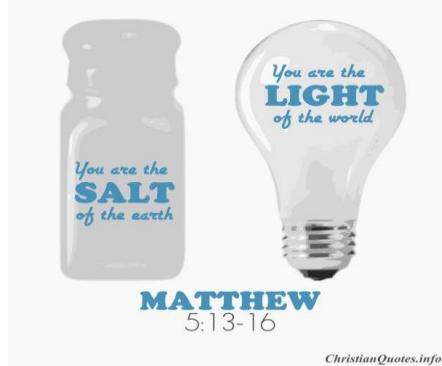


**FEBRUARY 8, 2025**  
**FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY**  
**MATTHEW 5:13**  
**“YOU ARE THE SALT OF THE WORLD”**



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Liturgy – Rev. Michael Anthony Howard  
Ushers -

(NCH) New Century Hymnal - CCLI LICENSE #11164431  
\*Please stand if comfortably able.  
Respond with words in **bold** print.

**SUMMARY OF SCRIPTURE TEXTS**

From “Preaching Through the Christian Year” Fred Craddock  
**Isaiah 58:1-9a** Today we hear a compelling cry for justice and kindness – a valuable reminder that God’s light shines no more brightly than when we serve humanity. Epiphany is the form of service.

**Psalm 112:1-10** Themes are echoed in today’s psalm in its insistence that light shines through the lives of the righteous. Here too righteous living is living omitted to others.

**1 Corinthians 2:1-16** We hear Paul clarifying the nature and essence of his missionary preaching and congregational teaching, insisting that both derive their power from God and not from human sources.

**Matthew 5:13-20** Matthew’s version pf Jesus’ teaching concerning the salt of the earth and the light of the world. The second image carries through themes from the Old Testament reading and the psalm as it presents disciples as the means of God’s manifestation.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER CONCERNS:**

**THE BELL IS RUNG:**

**PRELUDE: “Adoration” Roy E. Nolte**

**PENNIES FOR MISSION: Fairview Heights Food Pantry**

**\*RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

**Leader:** Shout it out—no holding back!

**People:** There is truth that needs to be spoken.

Leader: Let the people rise and hear it.

**People: We are listening. We stand ready.**

Leader: Shout to the weary, the overlooked, the worn-thin:

**People: With courage, we gather. With voices, we speak words of life.**

Leader: Shout to the hearts carrying hidden weight,

**People: The Holy One meets us here in our honesty.**

Leader: Shout to the systems that press people down,

**People: Their power is not the final word.**

Leader: A new song is rising—

**People: A song that frees, A rhythm that restores, A melody of reparation.**

Leader: Shout to the builders, the dreamers, the stubbornly hopeful:

**People: The time has come for burdens to lift, For the grip of harm to loosen, For the rebuilding what has been broken.**

Leader: Come, Beloved Community, Come.

bring your resolve, your compassion, your wide-aware faith.

**All: Let us worship the God who calls us to remove every yoke.**

#### **\*INVOCATION:**

Calling Voice That Won't Be Silenced,  
we come into this moment carrying the weight of our

days— the strain we feel in our bodies, the struggle we witness in our neighbors, the burdens that press on our shared life.

Draw near to us now. Gather our scattered breath.

Steady our trembling places. Kindle in us a courage that does not look away.

You are the One who refuses empty rituals and meets us instead in acts of mercy, in the work of lifting burdens, in the rebuilding of what has been harmed.

Open us now— open our hearts to compassion, open our imaginations to repair, open our hands to the work of freeing one another.

Let this time be honest, let this gathering be brave, and let your Spirit move among us with the power to uproot what harms and to plant what heals.

We are here. Speak to us. Lead us. Remake us for your justice and joy. Amen.

#### **\*OPENING HYMN: 181**

**"You Are the Salt for the Earth, O People"**

**\*PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE:**  
**Calling Presence who knows our hidden places, we admit that we have not always chosen the path that frees. We have stayed silent when truth asked for our voice; we have protected our comfort when**

**compassion asked for our hands; we have waited for others to do the work you entrusted to us.**

**Loosen our resistance, lift the habits that keep us from seeing one another clearly, and break the patterns that bind us to what harms.**

**Teach us the courage to act with mercy.**

**Teach us the discipline of repair.**

**Teach us the way of releasing what we cling to so that others may breathe more easily.**

**Let this moment mark a turning— a turning toward your justice, a turning toward your tenderness, a turning toward the shared life you imagine for us.**

**In your grace, make us new. Amen.**

**\*WORDS OF GRACE:**

Hear the good news: The One who calls us out in truth, meets us not with shame, but with mercy that lifts what is heavy and compassion that steadies our steps.

When we turn toward justice, God healing begins working in us. When we loosen what harms, God loosens the weight within us. When we offer ourselves to repair, God says to us, “Here I am.”

In this promise, receive your freedom. In this grace, begin again. Amen.

**SCRIPTURE LESSONS**

**OLD TESTAMENT: Isaiah 58:1-9a From “The Message”**

**Your Prayers Won’t Get Off the Ground**

<sup>1-3</sup> “Shout! A full-throated shout!

Hold nothing back—a trumpet-blast shout!

Tell my people what’s wrong with their lives, face my family Jacob with their sins!

They’re busy, busy, busy at worship, and love studying all about me.

To all appearances they’re a nation of right-living people— law-abiding, God-honoring.

They ask me, ‘What’s the right thing to do?’ and love having me on their side.

But they also complain,

‘Why do we fast and you don’t look our way?

Why do we humble ourselves and you don’t even notice?’

<sup>3-5</sup> “Well, here’s why:

“The bottom line on your ‘fast days’ is profit.

You drive your employees much too hard.

You fast, but at the same time you bicker and fight.

You fast, but you swing a mean fist.

The kind of fasting you do

won’t get your prayers off the ground.

Do you think this is the kind of fast day I’m after: a day to show off humility?

To put on a pious long face

and parade around solemnly in black?

Do you call *that* fasting,

a fast day that I, God, would like?

<sup>6-9</sup> "This is the kind of fast day I'm after:  
to break the chains of injustice,  
get rid of exploitation in the workplace,  
free the oppressed,  
cancel debts.

What I'm interested in seeing you do is:

sharing your food with the hungry,  
inviting the homeless poor into your homes,  
putting clothes on the shivering ill-clad,  
being available to your own families.

Do this and the lights will turn on,  
and your lives will turn around at once.

Your righteousness will pave your way.

The God of glory will secure your passage.

Then when you pray, God will answer.

You'll call out for help and I'll say, 'Here I am.'

#### **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 112:1-10 Page 697**

#### **EPISTLE: 1 Corinthians 2:1-16 (CEB) Words of Paul**

When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I didn't come preaching God's secrets to you like I was an expert in speech or wisdom. <sup>2</sup> I had made up my mind not to think about anything while I was with you except Jesus Christ,

and to preach him as crucified. <sup>3</sup> I stood in front of you with weakness, fear, and a lot of shaking. <sup>4</sup> My message and my preaching weren't presented with convincing wise words but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power. <sup>5</sup> I did this so that your faith might not depend on the wisdom of people but on the power of God.

#### **Definition of wisdom**

<sup>6</sup> What we say is wisdom to people who are mature. It isn't a wisdom that comes from the present day or from today's leaders who are being reduced to nothing. <sup>7</sup> We talk about God's wisdom, which has been hidden as a secret. God determined this wisdom in advance, before time began, for our glory. <sup>8</sup> It is a wisdom that none of the present-day rulers have understood, because if they did understand it, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory! <sup>9</sup> But this is precisely what is written: *God has prepared things for those who love him that no eye has seen, or ear has heard, or that haven't crossed the mind of any human being.* <sup>10</sup> God has revealed these things to us through the Spirit. The Spirit searches everything, including the depths of God. <sup>11</sup> Who knows a person's depths except their own spirit that lives in them? In the same way, no one has known the depths of God except God's Spirit. <sup>12</sup> We haven't received the world's spirit but God's Spirit so that we can know the things given to us by God. <sup>13</sup> These are the things we are talking about—not with words taught by human wisdom

but with words taught by the Spirit—we are interpreting spiritual things to spiritual people.<sup>14</sup> But people who are unspiritual don't accept the things from God's Spirit. They are foolishness to them and can't be understood, because they can only be comprehended in a spiritual way.<sup>15</sup> Spiritual people comprehend everything, but they themselves aren't understood by anyone.<sup>16</sup> *Who has known the mind of the Lord, who will advise him?* But we have the mind of Christ.

#### **\*GOSPEL: Matthew 5:13-20 (CEB)**

##### **Salt and light**

<sup>13</sup> "You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its saltiness, how will it become salty again? It's good for nothing except to be thrown away and trampled under people's feet.<sup>14</sup> You are the light of the world. A city on top of a hill can't be hidden.<sup>15</sup> Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they put it on top of a lampstand, and it shines on all who are in the house.<sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before people, so they can see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven.

##### **Jesus and the Law**

<sup>17</sup> "Don't even begin to think that I have come to do away with the Law and the Prophets. I haven't come to do away with them but to fulfill them.<sup>18</sup> I say to you very seriously that as long as heaven and earth exist, neither

the smallest letter nor even the smallest stroke of a pen will be erased from the Law until everything there becomes a reality.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, whoever ignores one of the least of these commands and teaches others to do the same will be called the lowest in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever keeps these commands and teaches people to keep them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.<sup>20</sup> I say to you that unless your righteousness is greater than the righteousness of the legal experts and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

##### **MESSAGE: "Light, Salt, and the Law"**

Chapters 5 -7 in Matthew's gospel contain what is called the Sermon on the Mount. It's a collection of sayings from Jesus. Whether or not these 3 chapters were really said in only one sermon, we don't know for sure. The batteries in Peter's tape recorder were dead.

We started chapter 5 last week when we talked about light. This week we have two lessons; one about salt and another about "the Law". I think we've all heard many versions of sermons about salt, so I'll give you the "Cliff Notes" or "Matthew for Dummies" version.

In the ancient world, salt was highly valued. In the time of Jesus salt was connected in people's minds with three special qualities. #1 Purity. #2 Salt was the commonest of all preservatives. #3 The greatest and the

most obvious quality of salt is that salt lends flavor to things. Because of those three qualities, Jesus calls his followers the salt of the earth. Of course, if the salt loses those qualities, the salt is useless. The same goes for Jesus' followers. Remember; purity, preservation, and flavor. Don't lose any of those, my friends. You don't want to be useless.

I'd like to spend the rest of my time talking about "the Law". I have many questions and maybe you do, too. Just to review verse 17,<sup>17</sup> "*Don't even begin to think that I have come to do away with the Law and the Prophets. I haven't come to do away with them but to fulfill them.*" What does that mean? I went to one of my favorite Bible historians to enlighten us on this.

Rev William Barclay, "At a first reading, it might be held that this is the most astonishing statement that Jesus made in the whole Sermon on the Mount. In this statement, Jesus lays down the eternal character of the law. Again and again, Jesus broke what the Jews called the law. You'll probably remember some of these. He did not observe the handwashings that the law laid down; he healed sick people on the Sabbath; he was in fact condemned and crucified as a law-breaker; he ate with sinners and touched lepers. And yet here he seems to speak of the law with a veneration and a reverence that no Rabbi or Pharisee could exceed.

Some people have been so puzzled by this saying that they have come to the conclusion that Jesus could not have said it. They have suggested that, since Matthew is the most Jewish of the gospels, and since Matthew wrote it specially to convince Jews, this is a saying which Matthew put into Jesus' mouth. But that is a weak argument, for this is a saying which is indeed so unlikely that no one would have invented it, Jesus **MUST** have said it. And when we see what it really means, we will see that it is inevitable that Jesus should have said it.

The Jews used the expression **the law** in four different ways. #1 They used it to mean the Ten Commandments. #2 They used it to mean the first five books of the Bible which is called the **Pentateuch** which literally means **The Five Rolls**. To Jews this was the law **par excellence** and was to them by far the most important part of the Bible. #3 Jews used the phrase **the law and the prophets** to mean the whole of Scripture; they used it as a comprehensive description of what we would call the whole Old Testament. #4 Jews used it to mean the **oral** or the **scribal law**.

In the time of Jesus, it was the last meaning which was commonest; and it was in this scribal law which Jesus so utterly condemned. So, what was it?

In the Old Testament itself, we find very few rules and regulations; what we do find are great, broad principles which people must take and interpret for themselves

under God's guidance, and apply to the individual situations in life. However, to the later Jews, these great principles did not seem enough. They held that the law was divine, and that in it God had said God's last word, and that therefore everything must be in it. If a thing was not in the law **explicitly**, it must be there **implicitly**. They therefore argued that out of the law it must be possible to deduce a rule and a regulation for every possible situation in life. So there arose a group of men called scribes who made it the business of their lives to reduce the great principles of the law to literally thousands upon thousands of rules and regulations.

For example, the law says that the Sabbath day is to be kept holy and that on it no work is to be done. So, what is work? To carry a burden on the Sabbath day is to work. But next a burden has to be defined. So the scribal law says a burden is "food equal in weight to a dried fig, enough wine for mixing in a goblet, milk enough for one swallow, honey enough to put on a wound, oil enough to anoint a small member, water enough to moisten an eye-salve, paper enough to write a custom-house notice upon, ink enough to write two letters of the alphabet, reed enough to make a pen" and so on endlessly. And this is just one small example. These things to them were the essence of religion. Their religion was a legalism of petty rules and regulations.

The scribes were the men who worked out these rules and regulations. The Pharisees were the men who kept all these rules and regulations. For many generations these rules were not written down. All Jews were supposed to memorize them. Finally in the third century AD a summary was written and it was called the **Mishnah**. Later Jewish scholarship wrote commentaries to explain the Mishnah and that was called the **Talmud**.

To strict orthodox Jews, in the time of Jesus, religion, serving God, was a matter of keeping thousands of legalistic rules and regulations; they regarded these petty rules and regulations as literally a matter of life and death and eternal destiny. Clearly, Jesus did not mean that not one of these rules and regulations was to pass away; repeatedly he broke them himself, and repeatedly he condemned them. All these hordes of man-made rules were certainly not what Jesus meant by the law.

So what did Jesus mean by fulfilling the law? Jesus meant that he was bringing out the true meaning of the law. The one great principle was that in all things people must seek God's will, and when they know it, they must dedicate their whole life to obeying it. Another great principle is love your neighbor as yourself. We have been brought up with these basic principles and Jesus is helping us know them and understand them. That's why we come to worship. Amen.

**SPECIAL MUSIC: Video**

**“I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light” Mark Hayes**

**PASTORAL PRAYER:**

Sovereign God, we cannot tell what life will bring us, but we do believe that you will never leave us, whatever comes.

**If** sorrow comes, comfort us with the hope of glory.

**If** illness comes, help us to bear it gallantly and to reach health again.

**If** disappointment comes, help us always to remember that in spite of everything, the best is always yet to be.

**If** we have to face a hard task or a difficult decision, make us sure that with the challenge there comes the power to do.

**If** we are tempted, help us to turn to the One who was also tempted and who conquered and who can enable us to share his victory.

**If** we are to be misunderstood and unappreciated, help us always to remember that you know us and that it is your verdict that matters.

Today we especially bless those who are in trouble and distress not of their own making; those to whom what has happened is beyond any explanation that they may accept what they cannot understand; those who have been led astray by someone else, that even yet they may find a way back; those whose background and

environment never really gave them a chance. Help them to rise above their circumstances and grant that we, who are more fortunate, may not rest until we rid this land of conditions in which no one should have to live, in circumstances in which no human being should be entangled.

Open our eyes, our ears, our hearts, and our mouths in these challenging times.

Bless our world. Bless all those in authority.

Bless all whom we love and especially those from whom we are separated.

Bless each and all of us that we may follow faithfully in the steps of our Lord Jesus Christ until with him we stand before your throne, O God. Amen.

**OUR LORD'S PRAYER:****PRAYER RESPONSE: 774 “Shepherd Lead”**

**Shepherd lead, lead me in your righteousness,  
Make your way plain before my face.  
For it is you, God You God only,  
who makes me to lie down in safety.**

**INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:**

Faithful Friends of God, the prophets tell us that devotion is revealed in the way we lighten each other's load—right here, in our streets and neighborhoods, where strain is real and hope needs partners.

When we give, we join the work of lifting burdens  
and repairing the places we call home.  
Let our offering be simple and true: open hands, willing  
hearts, and commitment to our shared life. Let us give.

**OFFERTORY: "Here I Am, Lord" David L. Schutte**

**\*DOXOLOGY:**

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise God, all creatures here below;  
Praise God above you heavenly host;  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen**

**\*UNISON PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING AND DEDICATION:**

**Calling Voice Who Leads Us Toward Freedom,  
we give thanks for every gift offered today—  
for open hands, willing hearts, and the courage to  
imagine a shared life made whole.  
Bless what we have brought. Let it move where relief is  
needed, where repair can begin, where dignity can rise.  
Make these gifts more than generosity— make them  
instruments of justice, seeds of compassion, signs that  
your vision is taking root among us.**

**For every burden lifted, for every neighbor tended,  
for every act of mercy made possible, we give you  
thanks. Carry us forward in this work with gratitude**

**deep enough to shape the world we are building  
together. Amen.**

**\*CLOSING HYMN: 573 "Lead On Eternal Sovereign"**

**\*BENEDICTION:**

May the Way, Truth and Life go with you,  
the Presence that unsettles what must change  
and steadies what must endure.

Let the weight on your shoulders grow lighter,  
not by forgetting it,  
but by letting others walk beside you.

Carry within you a courage that listens deeply,  
an imagination wide enough to rebuild ruins,  
and a tenderness fierce enough  
to unlearn every habit of harm.

And as you go— into streets that need mending  
and neighborhoods aching for breath—  
may you hear the Holy murmur "Here I am"  
in every shared burden, in every act of mercy,  
in every small unraveling of the yoke. Go in boldness.  
Go in gentleness. Go in the sacred work of making all  
things whole. Amen.

**\*BENEDICTION RESPONSE:**

**"Let There Be Peace on Earth"**

**THE BELL IS RUNG:**

**POSTLUDE: 524 "This Little Light of Mine"**

**Words on the screen**

**PRAYER LIST:** Cheri Schutzenhofer, Terry Thorpe,  
Grandson Landon, Lynne Knecht, Becky Ballard, Mary  
Lou and Urban Baum, Ronald Bopp, Geralyn Gammon,  
Gene Ganschinetz, Russ Hartmann, Marilyn Paul, Pam  
and Syd Safriet, Yvonne Weber, Stacie Pickens, Nikki  
Chatman.

**NOTICE:** Pastor Rosemary will be out for the next two weeks, recovering from a procedure. Angie Hausmann will lead service and bring the message. There may or may not be a bulletin during this time.