

## **EPIPHANY 5A “Living as Cats for Christ in a World Going to the Dogs for the Devil” Matthew 5:13-16**

Our nation is roughly divided between households with cats and ones with dogs. Are you one or the other? Neither? Or both? I grew up as a dog person (if you can call a poodle a dog). The first 25 years of our married life we had cats. Now with Cooper the Wonder Dog we are back to being a dog household. So I have experience with both dogs and cats. A dog will do anything for attention, acceptance and approval. A dog will roll over, fetch a stick, and shake hands. A dog just wants its ears scratched, its tummy rubbed and a doggy treat. A dog will jump into an icy pond, run through the woods or retrieve a dead bird if that is what its master wants.

Dogs have masters, cats have staff. They are a different story. You don't own a cat, a cat owns you. They are independent. Have you ever asked a cat to roll over? It will look at you like you are crazy. A cat does what a cat wants to do, which might mean to sleep in your bed all day, to sit in your lap, or to get in your face while watching television. Then it is off on its own. A cat will show love but on its own terms. Cats don't need acceptance or approval from anyone. They naturally feel good about themselves.

Why such talk about dogs and cats? Their characteristics are similar to how we live in this sinful world. Like dogs, we want the approval of the crowd. We will do demeaning, even destructive things to get admiring attention from others. But as believers in Jesus, we are to be like cats. That is, to live proud of the way God has made us and claimed us and to live independently from approval and acceptance of sinful world around us. We are Jesus' disciples who reflect the goodness and glory He gives us to world around us for praise of our heavenly Father.

### **I. The World is Going to the Dogs**

Those of us who have been around for awhile notice that life in this world is getting worse. There is a loss of shared values, a confusion of what's right and wrong, and a distain for “morality.” (dirty word). Any type of sex is a “divine right” while life itself is seen as being optional. There is no basic decency any more. Greed, physical

pleasure, selfishness, and the wanting of attention from others (“look at me”) control the actions of people. An old cliché says that this world is “going to the dogs”; but if those dogs are smart, they won’t want it.

We live like dogs when our actions are influenced by what everyone else does rather than by what God would have us do. A dog wants approval from its master. We want acceptance from the world. This world says “who needs marriage?” and we answer, “I guess we don’t.” This world says that drugs and alcohol are the thing to do, so we do them in order to fit in with the gang and to gain its acceptance. We spend money that we can’t afford or skimp on our offerings to God in order to buy the newest or nicest thing to show off to others. We pass on the latest piece of juicy gossip to impress others with how informed we are, to convince them that they can count on us for the local news. We want to be like other people in order to be liked by other people. But in doing so we are modeling ourselves after sinful people. Together we stand under the righteous judgment of God’s condemnation because of our sinful rebellion against His will.

## II. Jesus Shows Us the Better Way

While the world as we know it is going to dogs, our lives do not have to go with it. Our God has the better plan for us. His way is totally different from the world around us. We see that in God’s eternal Son who lived this life for us. God did not simply overlook, excuse or ignore the world’s rejection of His will. Jesus Christ came to live perfectly in our place. God did not ask us to sacrifice anything of ourselves to pay for our sins. Jesus sacrificed Himself on the cross for us. This shows the great difference between God’s ways and the ways of this world. God could have demanded His rights from us. “I’m your Creator, do as I say or suffer. Pay Me back or be punished” Force and fear, power and punishment is the world’s way.

Instead, our God of grace revealed Himself to us as a servant willing to suffer for us, to pay the debt we owe, to die the death we deserve. The world sees death as a defeat, an end. God uses death as means to victory, Jesus’ victory by His own resurrection from the dead. Jesus defeats our sin. Jesus overcomes our death. What Jesus does for us is totally different from anything this world could ever do for us.

### III. Jesus Calls Us to Be Different

#### A. We Are to Give Flavor to the World

In Holy Baptism Jesus unites us to Himself by resurrection in the midst of this dying life. In Holy Baptism Jesus frees us from our sin while in the midst of this sinful world. In Holy Baptism Jesus gives us faith in Him as our Savior in the midst of this unbelieving world. In Holy Baptism Jesus gives us a reason for living in the midst of this meaningless world. The difference we enjoy as the people of God in Jesus Christ through our baptism is the love and grace of God who came to win our salvation. This is the God who in Jesus Christ still comes to us with His body and blood in Lord's Supper to assure us that eternal victory.

In His Sermon on Mount Jesus describes our different lives with the image of salt. Salt as flavor for food adds taste to it. Jesus adds flavor to our life by spicing it up with faith, hope, love and promising us eternal life with Him after our death. Now that Jesus fills us with flavor we are to share this spiritual spiciness with the world around us. This world does need flavoring. It uses tasteless language in jokes to get laughs and in conversation to seem tough. It uses tasteless sex and violence on television in order to improve ratings. Our kind words, our loving acts, and our honest ways as believers in Jesus spice up, add flavor, to this bland, tasteless, and sinful world.

In Jesus' day salt was important as a preservative to keep food from spoiling. Our lives guided by the Holy Spirit act as preservative. This world is decaying. Sin and its effects eat away at moral fiber of the world and spoiling it like bad food. It is up to us to preserve this world. Our acts of charity, our words of hope, our lives of worship, and our education of children in the Christian faith preserve some decency in this rotten world. It is not government laws, taxes or prisons that is keeping this world from going nuts, it is the salt of our Christian lives preserving basic goodness.

#### B. We Give Light to Our Dark World

The other image Jesus uses is light. Light brightens dark places and makes them safe. We can hurt ourselves in our own houses walking around in the dark of night. The darkness of this world is our sin. As people living in sin's

darkness we hurt ourselves and one another. Jesus came to give the light of hope to this world, shining the way back to life with our God forever. Jesus makes us lights, specifically, reflectors of His light. For light to be true light, it must shine so that others can see its rays. The elites of society want us to keep our Christian faith to ourselves. Jesus calls us to live our lives like a city on hill or a lamp on stand. We live our Christian lives so that others see that faith in us.

There is a story of an older man who could not see well, could hardly hear and who walked slowly. He still attended worship every week but he couldn't get much from it. One Sunday a fellow church member asked, "Why do you still come?" The little man looked up and answered in loud voice, "Because others need to see me in worship." Whether it is our worship attendance, the way we raise our children, the way we treat others or how we act when think others not looking people need to see us living Christian lives. Not for them to be impressed with us, not for us to earn awards or to win praise, because we are not the light. We do our good works to reflect the true light of Christ that shines into our lives thru His Word and Sacraments. We live so that others will praise the true light, our Triune God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit who created, saved, and called us to a new life of faith and hope.

### Conclusion

In this passage Jesus uses images of salt and light to describe God's difference in our lives. If He were speaking to us today maybe Jesus would use the image of cats. They are proud and independent animals, happy with who they are apart from anyone's approval or acceptance. Jesus has made us cats with an out-of-this-world self-esteem which comes from God's great love for us. Jesus has made us salt adding taste to and preserving our world. Jesus has made us light, reflecting His glory into world. This comes from our God who loves us so much that He gives us His own Son so that we may not perish but have eternal life. AMEN