

The 5th Sunday after the Epiphany [a]

Trinity Lutheran, Alamogordo

February 8, 2026

Matthew 5:13-20

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. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. ¹⁷ "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

In the Name of Jesus.

If you want to know how to be a Christian, Jesus will tell you how to do that.

To be a Christian, be salt to this world. Salt brings tastes and seasoning. In a world filled with rot, a world teaching young women how to be objects, teaching young men how to grasp according to your desire, a world tempting some to envy and to grab after the wealth of others, tempting others to despise tear down neighbor, in this sinful world, *Be salt*. Bring health. You are the salt of the Earth, says Jesus. [Matthew 5:13]

To be a Christian, be light. In a world living by the lie, a world run by secret conversations and things done in the dark, *Be light*. You are the light of the world, says Jesus. [Matthew 5:14]

Let people see your good works, says Jesus, and that will give glory to your Father in Heaven. [Matthew 5:16]

So, every sermon will be in danger of ending up as methods and regulations for being salt; of ending up with procedures and strategies for how to let your light shine, and constant lists and rules for how to let people see your good works.

Every sermon will end up, in short, giving instructions how, if you're a Christian, the Law is your method, rule, procedure, strategy, and guide for life.

If we want to be a Christian, Jesus will tell us how. Let's just take the Bible and write huge red letters on it: Rule Book for Life—and we're off to the races.

I did not come to abolish the Law, says Jesus. [Matthew 5:17]

But then this:

"Not an iota,"

said Jesus,

"not a dot will pass from the Law until all is accomplished."

[Matthew 5:18]

In other words, if you want to live by the Law, you better be ready to live by the Law. The whole Law. No iota left out, no dot missing.

"I tell you,"

said Jesus,

"unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven."

The Scribes and Pharisees, these are the teachers of the Law. They kept every iota and dot. Or at least they thought they did, or pretended they did.

But you better be better than them, says Jesus. If you are going to live by the Law, you'd better surpass the Scribes and the Pharisees. Every iota. Every dot. The whole Law. Nothing left out. If you can't keep every iota and every dot of the Law, then you fall short, and you might as well keep none of it.

Love God with your whole heart, love neighbor as yourself—and it better be full blast, the whole enchilada, nothing left out. Or you might as well do nothing.

The Law is that full. The Law is that demanding, that all-encompassing. Who can do it?

Can the Apostle Paul do it? Not if you look at his hands and see the innocent blood of Stephen the martyr on them.

Can King David do it? Not if you look into his palace and see the great sin of his multiple wives.

Can the Apostle John do it? Not if you read the account of him arguing about how he would be the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Can St. Augustine do it? Not if you read the words of his own hand in his Confessions.

Who can do it? Not anyone who can look at himself in the mirror and remember even a fraction of the times he cared for self more than he cared for neighbor.

No one can do it. We know this. Our own lives testify to it.

No one can. Except One.

And that is what Jesus is teaching us. While the scribes and Pharisees are teaching you how to live under the Law, Jesus says,

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished."

[Matthew 5:17]

The Law, Jesus came to accomplish it. It is all completed in him.

That's the cross.

Later, after Jesus had ascended to Heaven, after he has sent forth the Apostles to proclaim his Gospel, the Apostle Paul proclaims to the Christians in Corinth,

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

[1 Corinthians 2:2]

Why didn't Paul say that he was proclaiming how to keep the Law? Why didn't he teach how to live the Christian life by following methods and systems of a Christian life? After all, Paul knew how to do all this. He had been trained up as a teacher of the Law, and he had been a chief Pharisee. He knew the Law inside and out. Every iota, every dot, every which-a-way.

But that's not what Paul wanted to teach the Church. Rather, Paul said,

When I came to you, I knew nothing among you except Christ and him crucified.

Because, the cross *is* the keeping of the Law.

The cross is the full accomplishment of the Law.

On the cross hangs the only One who has truly loved God the Father with his whole mind and soul and heart, and loved his neighbor more than himself.

The cross is Jesus loving his neighbor, loving you and me and our children, even to the point of his own death. The cross is Jesus keeping the full law and shedding the blood to atone for our failure of Law.

We are those given to proclaim him who kept every iota, every dot of the Law, even to his own death on the cross.

We are those who, as Paul puts it, know nothing except Jesus Christ in him crucified.

We are those who daily hear the Law, so that in that Law we see not a way we can justify ourselves, but rather, we daily see our sin, daily putting the old man of sin to death in repentance.

We are those who, in a world of Law where people are forever coming up with new systems of obedience and new methods of how to live a victorious life, a world driven by lofty speech and impressive wisdom—in this world, we are those give to speak in weakness and even trembling, giving thanks for the Gospel, and proclaiming nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

As the Church proclaims Christ crucified, our faith is given to rest not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God, which is the forgiveness of sins unto everlasting life.

In the Name of Jesus.