

The Church: Sent as Christ's Witness

Scripture: Matthew 5:13-16

July 26, 2026 - Week 4 of Sermon Series: "Being the Church"

Key Sentence: *The church gathers in worship so that it may scatter into the world as the visible light of Christ.*

Grace and peace to you in the name of God our Father, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, today we come to the final sermon in our July sermon series, "Being the Church." During this month, we have listened to several beautiful biblical descriptions of the church.

In the first week, we heard from Ephesians 2 that the church is God's household in Christ. We are no longer strangers and aliens, but members of God's household. Christ is our cornerstone, and the Holy Spirit is building us together.

In the second week, we heard from Acts 2 that the church is a community of worship and fellowship. The early Christians devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer. The church becomes alive when worship, fellowship, prayer, and care become the rhythm of God's people.

Last week, we heard from 1 Peter 2 that the church is living stones and a holy priesthood. The church is not only the pastor's ministry. The church is the ministry of the whole people of God. Every member matters, and every gift has a place in God's spiritual house.

Today, Jesus gives us another picture of the church. He says, "You are the salt of the earth" and "You are the light of the world."

This means the church is not called to live only inside its own walls. The church is not gathered only for its own comfort. The church is sent. The church gathers in worship so that it may scatter into the world as the visible light of Christ.

This is a strong closing message for our July series. After learning who we are as God's household, how we live as a worshipping and fellowshiping community, and how every member has a calling as a living stone, we now ask: How will God use us to bless our communities?

CPC Plainview is called to be a faithful witness in Plainview. CPC Rochester is called to be a faithful witness in Rochester. Both churches are called to reveal the light of Christ through love, service, truth, mercy, and faithful witness.

So today, I would like us to reflect on three movements from this passage:

First, Salt: A Preserving and Healing Presence

Second, Light: A Visible Witness of Christ

Third, Good Works: A Life That Glorifies God

The key sentence for today is this:

"The church gathers in worship so that it may scatter into the world as the visible light of Christ."

First, Salt: A Preserving and Healing Presence

Jesus says, "You are the salt of the earth."

In the ancient world, salt was very important. Salt gave flavor. Salt helped preserve food. Salt could be connected with cleansing and healing. Salt was small, but it made a real difference.

This is a beautiful image for the church. Salt does not usually call attention to itself. When salt is doing its work, it quietly changes what it touches. In the same way, the church is called to be a faithful presence in the world. We may not always be large or powerful, but we are called to make a difference where God has placed us.

A church becomes salt when it helps preserve what is good. A church becomes salt when it preserves hope in a discouraged world. A church becomes salt when it preserves kindness in a harsh world. A church becomes salt when it preserves truth in a confused world. A church becomes salt when it preserves mercy in a judgmental world. A church becomes salt when it preserves community in a lonely world.

Let me give a simple example. Imagine a meal without salt. It may have many good ingredients, but something is missing. Then just a little salt can bring out the flavor of the whole meal. The salt does not become the whole meal, but it helps the meal become what it was meant to be.

In the same way, the church is not the whole community of Plainview or Rochester. But the church is called to bring the flavor of Christ into the community: grace, patience, compassion, forgiveness, truth, and hope.

For CPC Plainview, being salt may mean being a faithful and caring presence in a smaller town where people know one another and where relationships matter deeply. It may mean praying for neighbors, supporting families, caring for farmers and workers, encouraging children and youth, and being known as a church where people can find welcome and peace.

For CPC Rochester, being salt may mean being a faithful and caring presence in a larger city with hospitals, schools, neighborhoods, newcomers, workers, families, and many people carrying hidden burdens. It may mean offering prayer, hospitality, friendship, and compassion in a city where many people are busy, tired, or searching for a spiritual home.

The places are different, but the calling is the same. The church is called to be salt.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) teaches that the congregation is the church engaged in the mission of God in its particular context. That means each congregation asks, "What does faithfulness look like here? What does love look like in this place? What does Christ's witness look like among these neighbors?"

So the application for us is simple: ask this week, "Where can I bring the flavor of Christ?"

Maybe in a family conversation. Maybe in coffee fellowship. Maybe in a hospital visit. Maybe in a school relationship. Maybe in a workplace. Maybe in a neighborhood. Maybe with someone who feels forgotten.

One kind word can be salt. One prayer can be salt. One visit can be salt. One act of patience can be salt. One moment of forgiveness can be salt. One quiet act of service can be salt.

The church is sent as Christ's witness when we become a preserving and healing presence in the world.

Second, Light: A Visible Witness of Christ

Jesus continues, "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid."

Light is different from salt. Salt often works quietly. Light is visible. Light shines. Light helps people see. Light gives direction. Light brings comfort in darkness.

Jesus says the church is the light of the world. This does not mean the church is the source of the light. Christ is the true light. But the church reflects the light of Christ.

Think about a mirror. A mirror has no light of its own. But when it faces the light, it reflects light. In the same way, the church has no glory of its own. But when the church faces Christ, worships Christ, follows Christ, and loves in the name of Christ, the church reflects Christ.

This is important for us. The church is not called to hide the light of Christ under a basket. The church is called to let the light shine.

A church hides the light when it becomes afraid. A church hides the light when it thinks only about itself. A church hides the light when it forgets its neighbors. A church hides the light when it keeps faith private and silent. A church hides the light when it stops expecting God to work.

But a church lets the light shine when it worships with joy. A church lets the light shine when it welcomes strangers. A church lets the light shine when it cares for the lonely. A church lets the light shine when it serves the poor. A church lets the light shine when it speaks truth with love. A church lets the light shine when it practices forgiveness. A church lets the light shine when it points people to Jesus Christ.

Let me give another example. Think about driving at night on an unfamiliar road. Even one small light can help you see where to turn. A porch light can help someone find the right house. A streetlight can help someone feel safer. A church light, spiritually speaking, can help people know that hope is still present.

When my wife and I first drove around Plainview and Rochester, we saw different roads and different communities. Plainview felt quiet and simple. Rochester felt larger and more complex. But both places need the same light of Christ. Both places have people who need hope, people who need prayer, people who need belonging, and people who need to know that God loves them.

This is part of our calling. We do not know every person who needs light. We do not know every burden in our community. But God knows. And God can use the witness of the church to shine light into places we may never fully see.

So the application is this: let us ask, "How can our church become more visible in love?"

Not visible for pride. Not visible for attention. Not visible for our own name. But visible so that Christ can be seen.

Maybe we shine by opening our doors with warmth. Maybe we shine by supporting local mission. Maybe we shine by blessing children and youth. Maybe we shine by praying for schools, hospitals, farms, businesses, and families. Maybe we shine by being known as a church where people are welcomed, not judged. Maybe we shine by becoming a place of peace in a divided world.

Jesus' words are addressed to His disciples as a community. He says, "You are the light of the world." The light is not for one person alone. The whole church together is called to shine.

A single candle can shine, but many candles together can fill a room with light. A single act of kindness matters, but a congregation practicing kindness together becomes a witness. A single prayer matters, but a church praying together becomes a house of light.

The church gathers in worship so that it may scatter into the world as the visible light of Christ.

Third, Good Works: A Life That Glorifies God

Jesus says, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

This verse gives the purpose of Christian witness. Good works are not for our own praise. Good works are not so people will say, "What a great church." Good works are so people may glorify our Father in heaven.

This is very important. The church serves not to show off, but to point to God. The church loves not to receive applause, but to reveal Christ. The church gives not to gain power, but to share grace. The church witnesses not to lift up its own name, but to glorify God.

The PC(USA) Book of Order names several Great Ends of the Church: the proclamation of the gospel, the shelter and nurture of God's children, the preservation of truth, the promotion of social righteousness, and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world. These are all ways the church's life points beyond itself to the glory of God.

The Brief Statement of Faith also says the Holy Spirit gives believers courage to witness to Christ and empowers us to serve Christ in our daily tasks. That means good works are not only special church projects. They can happen in daily life, in ordinary places, through ordinary people who belong to Christ.

Let me give a simple example. A candle does not ask people to look at the candle itself. A candle gives light so people can see what is around them. In the same way, the church's good works are not meant to make people admire us only. They are meant to help people see God's love, God's mercy, and God's grace.

Good works can be very simple. A meal for a grieving family. A ride to a doctor's appointment. A card sent to someone who is lonely. A prayer for a neighbor. A youth encouraged by an older member. A visitor welcomed warmly. A committee making decisions with humility. A congregation serving the community with joy.

These are not small things in God's kingdom. They are ways the light shines.

So the application is this: ask, "What good work can I offer so that God may be glorified?"

Not everything has to be big. Not everything has to be public. Not everything has to be organized by a committee. Every member can shine.

A child can shine with kindness. A youth can shine with courage. An elder can shine with wisdom. A deacon can shine with compassion. A musician can shine through song. A teacher can shine through patience. A quiet member can shine through prayer. A whole congregation can shine through love.

This is a beautiful way to close our series. In Week 1, we heard that we belong to God's household. In Week 2, we heard that we practice worship and fellowship. In Week 3, we heard that every member is a living stone. Now in Week 4, Jesus sends us out to shine.

We do not gather only to stay gathered. We gather to be formed by Christ, strengthened by the Spirit, and sent into the world God loves.

When the church lives this way, people may see our good works and give glory to God.

Conclusion

My brothers and sisters in Christ, today we close our July sermon series by hearing Jesus say, "You are the salt of the earth" and "You are the light of the world."

This is our identity. This is our calling. This is our mission.

The church is not called to exist only for itself. The church is not called to hide inside its building. The church is not called to preserve only its own comfort. The church is sent as Christ's witness.

We are sent to be salt: a preserving and healing presence. We are sent to be light: a visible witness of Christ. We are sent to good works: a life that glorifies God.

CPC Plainview is sent into Plainview. CPC Rochester is sent into Rochester. Both churches are sent into the world Christ loves.

So let us remember the key sentence:

"The church gathers in worship so that it may scatter into the world as the visible light of Christ."

May our worship form us. May our fellowship strengthen us. May our service send us. May our good works glorify God. May our lives point to Jesus Christ.

And may the light of Christ shine through us in Plainview, in Rochester, and beyond.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Reference Notes

1. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Book of Order 2025-2027, F-1.0304; G-1.0101.
2. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Book of Confessions, A Brief Statement of Faith, lines 52-80.
3. Thomas G. Long, Matthew. Westminster Bible Companion. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997, commentary on Matthew 5:13-16.
4. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Office of the General Assembly, "Be the salt and light in the world," November 16, 2022.
5. Amy G. Oden, "Commentary on Matthew 5:13-20," Working Preacher, 2014.
6. Melanie A. Howard, "Commentary on Matthew 5:13-20," Working Preacher, 2023.