

5 Epiphany A 2017
The Rev. Donna M. Wright
St. Matthew's Kellers Church
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Grace, mercy and peace to you, from our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen

Today we recognize Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts. Thank you for participating in our worship. I would like to call attention today to the Scout Law, which sets out the qualities of a Scout:

A Scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent.

It is the Scout **Law** to be those things. Obviously, no one is born having all those qualities; so the Scout Law is something to strive for. But you who are Scouts work on becoming trustworthy, loyal, helpful, brave, etc. It is your goal. What you seek to live up to.

We who are Christians have qualities and laws that we strive to live up to, also.

In today's gospel, Jesus says being his follower is having a particular identity. Being salt. Being light. Jesus expects us to be a little different, as salt is different from dirt, or other objects that are granular. Not only are we to have the strong flavor of God's grace, but Jesus expects us to be able to bring out the gifts of those around us, like salt can bring out wonderful and different flavors from beef and tomatoes and melons and caramel covered chocolates. Jesus expects us to make others better. Jesus wants us to be different, as light is different from anything else. A lamp makes a difference in a room. Especially at night. You don't turn on a lamp and then put a dark cloth over it. That would be a waste. And Scouts are supposed to be thrifty, right? Well, Christians are supposed to be good stewards, too. Jesus wants us to be light in the darkness. Even when it is hard, Jesus expects us to keep our identity as salt, as light. That is part of our calling as a "Christ-ian" – to bring out the good of others, to provide light, with our gracious forgiveness and with our good works.

But Jesus calls us to do more than that. What Jesus calls us to do is beyond what the scribes and Pharisees are already doing ~ which is obeying the law thoroughly. The scribes and Pharisees were devoted to obeying the law. They examined themselves closely, to make sure they were doing God's will. They were the best at that – and everyone knew it. Here in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus expects his followers to do better than the best. That is a lot to ask. But Jesus is not shy about asking it. Paul gives similar encouragement, in his letter to the Corinthians. These Christ-ians were

not to merely know the law, and do the law, but to love the One who gave the law (1 Cor. 2:9d). To cherish the Spirit of God that is inside us. To respond to the vulnerable, as God in Jesus became human and very vulnerable.

God does indeed expect a lot of us. To know the law; but to know and love the Lawgiver even more. To pay attention to the deepest things that God desires of us. The people in Isaiah's time were complaining about God not recognizing how well they were following God's laws. "Can't you see how we are following the laws about fasting? Why aren't you impressed with how we are humbling ourselves before you, God?" God replied, telling them that, in God's eyes, sharing food and shelter and clothing with those who have little is better than fasting. But God had given them all those laws: the laws about fasting, and the laws about taking care of those in need. So how could they choose which law is more important, and when?

I suppose you could say the same about the Scout Law. When someone is struggling to stay afloat in a rushing creek, that would not be the time to be cheerful – to say, "Hey, life is good; don't forget that!" That would be the time to be helpful and possibly brave, to get a rope or sturdy stick, to enlist the help of others and to **do it right away!** And don't worry about being courteous. Or particularly reverent. Knowing when to do which of God's many laws can be tricky – but it can also be obvious. Knowing when to fast and when to be courteous. Knowing when to care for the oppressed and when to be trustworthy.

Our identity is to be salt and light. To bring the best out of everyone. Our calling as Christ-ians is to not just know the law, but to love the law-giver. And the best way of loving God is to love the most vulnerable around us. Amen