

The Salt of The Earth

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Matthew 5

[13] "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled underfoot.

Mark 9

[49] For everyone will be salted with fire.

[50] Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another."

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Grace to you, and peace, from God Our Father and Our Lord and Savior Jesus The Christ!

"Please pass the salt." I was taught to say this very early in my life, as no doubt, were you. What are your first memories of salt? Did you learn very early, as I did, that a little salt on watermelon brings out the flavor more? The same for tomato slices.

Please pass the salt.

So, it comes as no surprise that Jesus tells us to have salt in ourselves. Just what is he saying?

In Jesus' day, the disciples believe their lifestyle is an exclusive affair. Anyone who is different, who doesn't think like we do, needs to be stopped. Likewise, Mark's Gospel shows us that the disciples are caught up in conflict with each other and with the people around them, including the little people: the poor, the maimed, the blind, the lame, the children and the hungry.

So Jesus lays it on the line. If you mess with these my little people, if you cause one of them to stumble, you will suffer dire consequences.

What does this say to anyone who would try to follow Christ and at the same time seek to exclude? Jesus reminds the disciples in Mark: everyone will be salted with fire! This is an acknowledgment of the people to whom Mark's Gospel is addressed, the 75 or so Christians in the City of Rome who are suffering and dying, often being burned at the stake, because of their faith.

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Jesus uses the term “salted with fire” as a metaphor for death. It comes from the practice of putting salt on sacrificial offerings as they were about to be burned.

Jesus is telling his disciples: you, who would be so exclusive, recognize that you will be excluded one day. You are going to die. Life is going to elude and exclude you! Wake up! The Kingdom of God is all inclusive!

Then Jesus says in Mark: “⁵⁰ Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another.”¹

When Jesus says, “Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another,” he is saying: “It is your job to go out and permeate the world with God’s flavor and God’s favor, to add God’s pizzazz to everyone’s lives, to preserve God’s covenant of unconditional love for all the human family through deeds of love and mercy and forgiveness. You can’t do that unless God’s favor and God’s flavor are in your own hearts, unless you yourselves are permeated with them, unless you yourselves have in you God’s pizzazz. As that happens, you will be at peace with one another. Your self-seeking, power-grabbing, control-freaking, excluding ways of living will come to an end. You will lose yourself, as salt does when it permeates food. As that food is eaten, people will say, “Ah, delectable! You really should try some of this!”

In the Sermon on the Mount, which is our Gospel for today, Jesus declares, not just to his disciples, but to all who are gathered to hear him: “You are the salt of the earth.”

Here I want to share with you some insights on this from Debie Thomas, who writes a weekly essay for the Palo Alto website, “Journey With Jesus”:

“ ... when Jesus calls his listeners ‘the salt of the earth’ ... he is telling us who we are. ... we are precious. ...it’s easy to miss the import of this in our modern world where salt is cheap and plentiful, but imagine what Jesus’ first followers would have heard when he called them salt. ... Remember what sorts of people Jesus addressed in his famous Sermon on the Mount - the poor, the mournful, the meek, the persecuted, the hungry, the sick, the crippled, the frightened, the outcast, the misfit, the disreputable, the demon-possessed. “*You*,” he told them all. “*You* are the salt of the earth.” ... you are essential. You are worthwhile. You are treasured. And I am commissioning you. ... salt does its best work when ... it dissolves into what is around it. ... Salt isn’t meant to cluster. ... It’s meant to share its unique flavor in order to bring out the best in all that surrounds it. Which means that if we want to enliven, enhance, deepen, and preserve the world we live in, we must not hide within the walls of our churches. ... Salt doesn’t exist to preserve itself; it exists to preserve what is *not* itself.

¹ Mark 9:50

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“Lastly, salt is meant to enhance, not dominate. Christian saltiness heals; it doesn’t wound. It purifies; it doesn’t desiccate. It softens; it doesn’t destroy. Even when Christian saltiness has an edge, even when, for example, it incites thirst, it only *draws* the thirsty towards the Living Water of God. It *doesn’t* leave the already thirsty parched, dehydrated, and embittered.”

So, would you please pass the salt! You’re still having trouble finding it? Here’s what it looks like:

Two brothers lived on adjoining farms separated by a creek. They fell into conflict with a small misunderstanding that grew into a major fracture. Weeks of hostile silence followed the exchange of bitter words.

Not long afterwards there is a knock one morning on the older brother’s door. Opening the door, the older brother encounters a man with a carpenter’s toolbox who is eager to do odd jobs around the farm. After thinking for a quick moment, the brother says, “Yes, I have a job for you.” Pointing toward the creek, he says, “I want you to build an eight foot fence by this creek, so I won’t need to see my brother or his farm anymore.”

After readying the supplies for the carpenter, the older brother leaves for the day. All day long the carpenter measures, saws, and nails, and just about sunset, as the farmer returns home, the carpenter is completing his task.

The farmer’s jaw drops, for the carpenter has not built a fence at all. Instead, he has created a bridge stretching from one side of the creek to the other. Not only that, but he sees his younger brother starting across the bridge, his hands outstretched as he says, “You are quite a fellow to build this bridge after all I’ve said and done.” The two brothers meet one another in the middle, embracing.

Turning, they see the carpenter hoisting his toolbox on his shoulder. “Wait!” says the older brother. “I have lots of other projects for you.” “I’d love to stay,” responds the carpenter, “but I have many more bridges to build.”²

<https://www.journeywithjesus.net/lectionary-essays/current-essay>

Amen.

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