

SALT & MATTHEW 5:13-16 LIGHT

“You are the salt of the earth” Jesus tells his disciples on the heels of the teaching that started with the Beatitudes. Salt is essential for life. Salt, then as now, seasons and preserves food. With no refrigeration, salting meat for a long journey provides a meal when one is far from home, just as we might eat beef jerky on a hike these days.

With too much salt, though, food becomes inedible. With too much salt, high blood pressure and other negative medical conditions exist. With too much water, however, salt dissolves into the water and is usually of no further use.

“You are the salt of the earth” Jesus tells his disciples. But what does this mean when salt can be both good and bad. How do we determine how much salt is enough – or how much is too much before it is worthless?

Salting roads when ice begins to form on roadways can keep cars from sliding into a ditch or off a bridge. But salt on roadways also rusts the undercarriage of your car. Salt – good and bad effects.

“He is the salt of the earth” -usually means someone whose word you can count on. Someone who is honest and true. Someone who is dependable. A friend when you need help.

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus tells his disciples that they are to “have salt in themselves and be at peace with one another” (Mk. 9:50). The disciples then were to be persons who could be characterized as being the salt of the earth. People who knew the Lord and trusted in God. People who were righteous in the best sense of the word. People who were in right relationship with God.

Paul, writing to the church at Colossae, tells them to “Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone” (Col. 4:5-6).

The Gospel – the good news of Jesus the Christ and his life, death and resurrection, is the salt that brings spice to our lives. Jesus is like the salt water that draws out inflammation in a sore throat- enabling your body to become healthy again

In Biblical times, salt was also representative of the covenant between God and the people. In Leviticus, we are told that “You shall not omit from your grain offerings the salt of the covenant with your God; with all your offerings you shall offer salt” (Lev. 2:13).

Salt is essential to life. In fact, our bodies contain salt similar to the ratio found in salt water.

Isaiah 58:1-12; PS. 112:1-10; 1 Cor. 2:1-16; Mt. 5:13-20

Tears are salty as is our sweat. Prentice Stout, writing in the Rhode Island Sea Grant, reminds us that: “Salt regulates the exchange of water between our cells and their surrounding fluids. One component of salt, sodium (Na), is involved in muscle contraction including heartbeat, nerve impulses, and the digestion of body-building protein. Humans contain about eight ounces of salt. The amount of salt is regulated in our bodies by our kidneys and by perspiration.”¹

Salt is as essential to our human body as it is a symbol of our essential covenant with God. What is this covenant we have with God? Love God. Love neighbor. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Jesus did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. Jesus threatened the powers of the day precisely because he challenged their authority. He challenged the way the Torah was interpreted. He expanded our understanding of the law given by Moses.

Jesus did not abolish the law of the prophets found in the Torah and the other scripture of the Hebrew Bible. Rather, Jesus provided the lens through which we are to live. Every act we take is to be done and to be seen through an understanding that our covenant with God is paramount. Nothing – **nothing** – supersedes our obligation to love God and to love neighbor.

Brett Younger says that “lots of churchgoers know everything about worship except that it should change us...”² Worship for these churchgoers has lost its salt.

The prophet Isaiah is chastising those who “did not let worship trouble their consciences. If they kept their distance from God, then they could keep their distance from God’s children” according to Younger. He challenges us to reflect upon why we come to church. Some come to see and be seen. Some come because of parental or peer pressure. And some come because the Word of God, made manifest in Jesus, adds flavor and spice to their life. “Isaiah calls people to the kind of worship that does more than anesthetize the conscious.”³ Isaiah rails against form over substance. Of fasting because it is the socially expected thing to do.

Isaiah encourages us to reflect on when we take one position while at church but fail to see how we take conflicting positions in our workplace. Such inconsistencies – such failures to consider the impact of our words and our deeds throughout all of our life, do not please God.

The fast that Isaiah calls acceptable to the Lord is one where each of us considers what we have and finds ways to “loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke; to let the oppressed go free.”

Isaiah, speaking the words God has given this prophet to speak, makes clear that as long as injustice exists, we are to share our bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into our house (Is. 58:6-7).

¹ <http://seagrants.gso.uri.edu/factsheets/salt.html> (February 8, 2014)

² Brett Younger in *Feasting on the Word*. Year A, vol. 1 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 317.

³ Younger, 319.

Isaiah 58:1-12; PS. 112:1-10; 1 Cor. 2:1-16; Mt. 5:13-20

When there is enough for all, then our light shall spring forth. Then shall the Lord answer the cry for help. Then shall our light rise in the darkness and the gloom shall be like noonday (Is. 58: 8-10). Jesus and Isaiah command us to speak out, to act, to bring about “enoughness” for every creature. The kingdom of God has come near, Jesus tells us. When we, God’s children, truly understand that in Christ we live and move and have our being. Then we can do nothing less than seek “enoughness” for all God’s creatures.

God seeks our true worship – not empty acts. Not worship without justice. As Christians we are to do more than “go along to get along.” We are to be the salt of the earth. The one whose bedrock is faith in Jesus Christ, who calls us his own. The same Jesus Christ who calls us to be a light to the world.

On coastlines across the world, lighthouses stand as warnings and as beacons. The light tells sailors that the shore is near and rocks or reefs may exist and pose a danger. But that light, burning in the darkest night guides us, also, to safety on shore. During the holidays, it is customary in many places to place a candle in a window. A candle that burns the night through. A symbol of home and hearth and safety. A light that overcomes the darkness and the dangers of the night.

We keep a candle burning in the sanctuary 24/7 symbolizing the presence of God in this place. Each of us is to be a candle burning with God’s light 24/7. With God’s grace, we can be the light on the hill visible to all. Do not hide your light under a bushel basket.

Barbara Brown Taylor sees the challenge this way: Our “ job is to find your own words for what matters most and then to give yourself fully to speaking them, so that anyone who looks at you can see God’s own truth come to life.”⁴ Be someone of whom it can be said: that person is the salt of the earth. That person is one where God’s own truth has come to life.

Bishop Michael Curry tells the story of his second day as a parish priest. He was in his office in a parish in Baltimore. That parish had a preschool so lots of little children from about ages 3 to 5. His office was right across from the men’s bathroom. Before too long, a little boy peeked on his way to the bathroom stopped and looked in at Michael. Looking around for a few minutes. Then, the little boy asked: “Are you God?” Well, that will take you aback! And Michael responded after a pause: “No, but I work for him.” May all of us work for God.

Let us pray: O God, let something happen to me, something more than interesting or entertaining or thoughtful. O God, let something essential happen to me, something awesome, something real. Speak to my condition, O Lord, and change me somewhere inside where it matters, A change that will burn and tremble and heal, and explode me into tears or laughter or love that throbs or screams or keeps a terrible cleansing silence, and dares the dangerous deed. Let something happen in me which is my real self, O God.⁵ May I be salt of the earth. May I be a light to all with whom I come into contact. May all know that I can be trusted and believed. Help me live in ways that love God and love neighbor. *Amen.*

⁴ Barbara Brown Taylor. The Seeds of Heaven (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), ix.

⁵ Ted Loder used in “Crazy Christians” on www.churchnexttv.org program week of January 27, 2014.