

## Got Salt?

Epiphany 5A  
Isaiah 58:1-9a;  
Matthew 5:13-20

### Slide 1: Salt

Being from the Pacific Northwest as I am, I did not grow up with salt being spread all over the place. What I mean by that is that our winters there in comparison to here, were so mild, that when it did snow, pretty much the entire world stopped. Two inches would cancel school, work, and most activities. It's not because Seattleites are wimpy; people who live with gray and rain year round are definitely not wimpy people. It's just that in the entire city of Seattle, they had one plow. And, putting salt on the roads, although I'm certain they would have on the highways, it still was a rare thing.

It wasn't until I moved here that this analogy of salt that Jesus uses began to speak to me in ways I never imagined. During our winters here, I get salt on my shoes, salt on my pants, salt on the car and salt traipsed into the house. We even have to get salt melt that is pet friendly, because

we really don't want Luna to eat that stuff. I remember last year when we got snow storm after another snow storm after another that I'm pretty certain my car mats weren't clean again until June.

Jesus said to his followers "You are the salt of the earth." So...*Got salt?* Are you the salty stuff that Jesus wants you to be in the analogy he uses in this Gospel reading today? Of course, Jesus is using salt as an analogy for something, but why he chooses salt of all things? And, really, can salt lose its saltiness anyway? Should we take what Jesus says here with a grain of...salt?

Well, in Jesus' day, salt was very important. In fact, it was so important that people were paid in salt. For some people, it was their salary; because, if you had salt, you could trade it for other goods. It was used in all the religious rituals of the day, and it was vital for preserving food. It kept foods from going bad or rotting. After all, they did not have such a thing as refrigeration! Therefore, if you had salt, you had economic security and you had life. Salt equaled life.

So, when Jesus talked about being salt for the earth, he was saying some really important things:

### Slide 2: VALUE

1. Salt = **VALUE**, which means Jesus is saying you are valuable! Dear siblings in Christ, you are valuable! You have value and a special place in this life and in your faith relationship with Christ. Not only that, you are valued as a part of Christ's body. The apostle Paul parses this out in his letter to the people in Corinth when he reminds them of their value, and that each person has special gifts that are to be used for the sake of the church and the world:

**"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."**

### Slide 3: PURPOSE

2. Salt = **PURPOSE** which means it is a useful spice to the world. It serves the purpose of flavor and

preserving food. Anyone who is on a heart medication knows just how useful salt is and how much they just might miss it. It adds flavor to a meal so that it can be enjoyed. It can be enjoyed by others, too as long as it is shared. Just as salt is used for every purpose of life, we are called to use what we are given for purpose in our lives, for the sake of the Gospel, the neighbor, and ourselves.

As a part of this Gospel from Matthew, Jesus uses his second analogy just in case we aren't getting the salt thing by talking about being a lamp without a shade on it; that way, the whole world will see the light of the Gospel. In fact, we hear from this very text in scripture what we hear at a baptism:

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

This means that Jesus intends for us to use our time, talents, and possessions to be useful for the world, to be seen in our serving with a heart of love, grace and mercy, just as God does. Jesus wants us to use what he

gave us fully and completely; otherwise, it isn't useful, either to ourselves or to others. That is one of the central purposes of discipleship.

#### **Slide 4: INTEGRITY**

3. Salt = **INTEGRITY** for the whole body. I know this sounds strange, but low salt in the body is deadly. We need salt to be alive. Salt equals life. Anyone who is dangerously low in sodium is hospitalized.

But, Jesus is speaking about the integrity of the salt, whether it is being used for the purpose it is meant to be or not. How is the integrity of the salt that is produced? The prophet Isaiah prophesies to the people of God in the Old Testament reading for today that they are using their gifts for wrongful purposes. They are not using them to lift up those who are hungry, the naked, and the oppressed. They are not loosing the bonds of injustice that is clearly noticeable around them and instead are living their best life without considering the lives of others. As a reminder, this is what the prophet warns them about:

**“Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers. Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice hear on high.”**

It is clear in this passage of the Bible that God is displeased when people do not use their “saltiness” to better the world, and instead take, grab, fight, and manipulate to get to the top. In the end, it led to their defeat and captivity by the Babylonian Empire. It led to their slavery, and bondage, something that may have been avoided if they had listened and obeyed the Lord God with integrity. Instead, they were keeping their “salt” to themselves while turning a blind eye to those in need. Jesus tells us then, that if salt loses its integrity, it is no longer healthy for the body, whether that be the church body, the community, nations, or the world.

#### **Slide 5: VALUE, etc.**

#### **VALUE. PURPOSE. INTEGRITY.**

To the ancient world, salt meant a lot of things that may be a

little lost on us today, but the analogies still hold.

You have **VALUE** in the body of Christ and in the world.

You have **PURPOSE** in this life and for the sake of the neighbor and world.

And, you are called to have **INTEGRITY**, so that the world may be life giving to all.

**Slide 6: salt**

This is what salt does when it is spread around. Take it from a Seattle girl who finally gets it. Salt gets the job done. Jesus calls all of us to do the same. Amen.