

February 05, 2023

Matthew 5:13

“Are You Salty Salt?”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

*“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.” - Matthew 5:13*

In the salt library of [Koyuncusalt.com](http://Koyuncusalt.com), there is an interesting article titled *How Long Does Salt Keep Its Flavor?* This is quite relevant to our text that I just read. You need to know it too. The article states:

... in its natural form, without additives, salt doesn't lose its saltiness or flavor. Consumable salt is a mineral compound consisting of sodium and chloride (NaCl). It is extremely stable and therefore cannot lose its savor or degrade over time ... As a matter of fact, the notion of salt losing its saltiness derives from the Christian Bible. It was used as a metaphor in a religious lesson. *However, salt could indeed lose its flavor in the New Testament times.* The primary reason for that was because often, salt wasn't pure back then. Salt might lose its flavor under certain conditions when it contains chemical impurities.

It was the first and last sentences that caught my attention. Please allow me to read them now together: “... in its natural form, without additives, salt doesn't lose its saltiness or flavor ... Salt might lose its flavor under certain conditions when it contains chemical impurities.” On the one hand, salt cannot lose its saltiness. On the other hand, it can - when there are additives, under certain conditions, when there are chemical impurities. Indeed, refined salts have an expiration date or a best if used by date because salt can be degraded so that it is no longer any good. A powerful warning to all of us who are Christian people.

Jesus says that we are the salt of the world, “but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?” So what exactly do you think Jesus meant by saying that we are the salt of the world? Moreover, **Are you Salty Salt?** Jesus says in the gospel of St. Mark (9:50b): “Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another.” So how does one have salt in themselves? Good question.

All of this salt language is deeply rooted in the Old Testament and the Grain Offering. In Leviticus 2:13, it says: “You shall season all your grain offerings with salt. You shall not let the salt of the covenant with your God be missing from your grain offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt.” In contrast to this command, the people were expressly forbidden to add yeast and honey with the grain offering, since yeast and honey pointed to impurity and disintegration. Salt pointed to purity and preservation as it is used to keep things from decay. The heart of the grain offering was about the preservation of peace with God that is found only in the self-sacrifice or offering of our Savior.

After his resurrection from the dead, we are told that Jesus ate and drank with his disciples on many occasions. However, on one occasion in Acts 1:4, Luke reports that Jesus “shared salt,” that is, he ate or salted with his disciples. Our English Standard Version of the Bible doesn't translate it that way, but the word makes it clear and points out that Jesus is the salt of the covenant who as priest and sacrifice is now eating/salting peacefully with his disciples. He is furthermore telling them to remain in Jerusalem for the time of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit will give birth to the salt of the New Testament which proclaims

Jesus who is our salt. In other words, the way in which we have salt in ourselves is to have Jesus and his peace. He purifies and preserves us in our relationship with him. Jesus is our salt who ever salts us in the gospel and sacraments. This is why the apostle Paul writes in Col. 4:5-6, "Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person."

How can we be anything good to outsiders - to unbelievers - if we ourselves are not salted in Jesus? How can we make the best use of the time we have if we ourselves do not even use our time to grow in the purifying and preserving salt of Jesus' person and work? How may we know how to answer each person for the faith that we have if we have never bothered to be salted by the Bible that speaks so wonderfully of our Savior and the peace that passes all understanding?

The taste of this creation and life down here and our future, has become tasteless as a result of rebellion against God and our lovelessness toward one another. But we have the salt shaker that can bring purity and preservation to others. We have the salt that can bring out the taste of who God is and his gracious will for us in Jesus Christ, his one and only Son. But there is a great danger. The salt can lose its saltiness. **Are you Salty Salt?** Or, are you on the verge of losing your saltiness? Of course, this raises the question for all of us: How can one lose their saltiness?

With that, we are now brought to additives, certain conditions, chemical impurities, and the question of shelf-life. In Jesus alone do we continue to be salt. When we add yeast and honey to the sacrifice of Jesus - those things that lend themselves to impurity and decay - the purity and preserving power of the good news of salvation begins to decrease. It loses its power in us because we have corrupted it with things that are contrary to it so that we are no longer good for anything. It is clear that this unbelieving world is evil, corrupt, and deficient. Jeffrey A. Gibbs in his commentary on *Matthew* writes (pg. 260):

The earth needs to be salted; people need to be called to "repent" and believe the Good News that in Jesus "the reign of heaven stands near" (4:17). Moreover, only Jesus himself, and then Jesus' disciples by virtue of their relationship with him, can do for the world what it needs. If his disciples were to turn away from and reject his calling, they would "become tasteless" (5:13), and then no means would remain for the earth to receive the necessary blessing: "By what means will it [the earth] be salted?"

Yes. By what means? God has called us to be salt shakers in a world that desperately needs the taste of the cross and empty tomb - the forgiveness of sins and the anticipation of something better than what is down here.

Our days are similar to the days when the men of Jericho said to Elisha the prophet in 2 Kings 2, "Behold, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord sees, but the water is bad, and the land is unfruitful." So it is becoming increasingly with America. There is so much that is pleasant, but when the water is bad and the land is unfruitful, as we see it to be the case in our day, what will cure it? The prophet said: "Bring me a new bowl, and put salt in it." So they brought it to him. Then he went to the spring of

water and threw salt in it and said, “Thus says the Lord, I have healed this water; from now on neither death nor miscarriage shall come from it.” Christ is the only salt that can heal what is bad. And this salt of Jesus is now in you.

With that in mind, we are to throw ourselves out like salt into the bad water to heal it. This is truly what it means when Jesus says that we are the salt of the world. And this we do in our ordinary, everyday life. But this amazing work, that we do, is only extraordinary because it is connected to Jesus and his cross and empty tomb. Like I said in my last Sunday morning sermon: “God has made us miracle workers. By the words we speak and the lives we live and the invitations we make by mouth or by letter we are about the business of raising the spiritually dead unto newness of life.” Or, like when Elisha threw salt into the bad water to heal it. We have come to take the death out of it, because that is what the salt of Jesus Christ does.

In Roman times salt was so precious that it was used, at least in part, to pay workers. Can you imagine that? Salt was used as money. You don’t believe me? Our English word “salary” comes from the Latin *salarium*, which is a word for salt. Perhaps you have heard the expression: “A person who doesn’t do his work is not worth his salt.” So how about you? **Are you Salty Salt?**

Salt passes on the healing that comes from Jesus. It halts the corruption and decay resulting from rebellion. It preserves the people that we come into contact with it so that they have eternal life. Salt that is kept in a container is no good. Salt must be sprinkled. It our sacrifice of thanksgiving whenever we care for people around us. It is the pouring out of one’s life for their salvation. May God make us salt shakers that never run out of salt!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott