

“Taste & See”

Psalm 34:1-8 & Matthew 5:13-16
Rev. Jo Ramsey, February 9, 2014

When you think of salt, there's a good chance the first thing that comes to mind is table salt. A pinch of salt is essential in most recipes. You might crave a salty snack occasionally... popcorn, potato chips, French fries. We have a good friend who even salts her pizza! And actually salt is essential to human health. It regulates the heartbeat and the balance of fluids in the body. We die without it.



But some people worry about salt, like if you have high blood pressure. Around here, the road crews having been worrying about salt too -- road salt. Our area is



experiencing a serious shortage of rock salt due to severe weather. Not only are we using more, the shipping routes – the Mississippi River and Great Lakes are covered in thick ice. Just one company provides the rock salt for nearly all of the municipalities in our five western Pennsylvania counties. As of Thursday, American Rock Salt has more than 200

back orders, totaling 25,000 tons of salt. Much of the region is conserving salt by using it only on hills and curves.



Salt has been a precious commodity and integral part of life since ancient times. As far back as 6050 BC, salt has played a role in economics and trade, health and healing, food flavoring and preservation and religious purification. Salt held such value that it was used as money. In fact, our word “salary” comes from the Latin word *salarium* which referred to the wages paid to Roman soldiers---wages paid in salt. Back then, salt was used to purchase slaves, and even today we hear the phrase that someone is, or is not, “worth their salt.”

There are scholars who use salt to trace the unfolding of human history. Entire trade routes were built to supply salt. The Via Salaria, known as the Salt Road, was constructed to transport salt from the Adriatic Sea to Rome. The Erie Canal has been called the ‘ditch that salt built’ because it was paid for with salt taxes and was in fact created to transport salt. It was a tax on salt that started the French Revolution, much like our Boston Tea Party. Did you know that an



entire Civil War battle was fought to control the salt mines in Saltville, VA? In ancient times, whole communities were ruined by the practice of salting the earth---the military ritual of

scattering salt in the fields of conquered cities to ruin crops and soil. The Romans salted the earth around Carthage in 149 BC - nothing grows there to this day.

Even our faith reflects the impact of salt. Our word, 'salvation' also comes from the word salt - because it was used to purify and to seal covenants. Until Vatican II, the Catholic Church placed a small taste of salt on a baby's lip at his or her baptism. Salt has long been believe to ward off evil. Think of throwing a pinch over your left shoulder to ward off any evil spirits lurking behind you. Take a close look at Leonardo Da Vinci's painting of The Last Supper, and you will see that Judas has spilled over a bowl of salt.



Since this time, spilling salt has been considered bad luck, but perhaps this was also be an allusion to the sealing of a new covenant, for salvation was at hand.

a powerful impact on everything it touches - for good or for bad. And it doesn't lose its saltiness as much as it can be contaminated or diluted. Jesus

Whatever we know about salt, we do know it's extremely valuable. It's essential to human health. It has

understood all this when he said, "You are the salt of the earth." You - you fishermen, you women at the well, you tax collectors, you basic people - you are valuable. You are a precious commodity. God will purchase you at great



price. Through Christ, you have the power to season a tasteless world. You can purify, you can preserve a lost and dying human race.

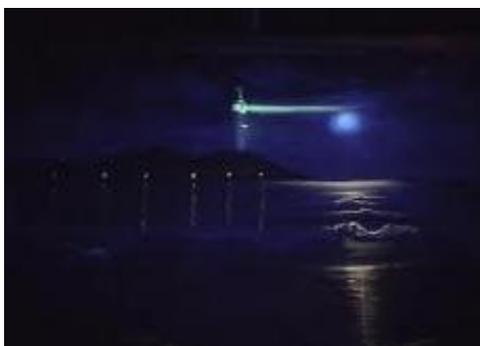
And he says it to us too...You teacher, you nurse, you mechanic, you engineer, you mom...You are precious. You can flavor your work place with God's grace. You can sprinkle a little encouragement

on your children. You can shake some hope into a conversation with a discouraged friend. You can stir some patience into a conflict with your partner. Don't let yourself be contaminated or diluted by distraction. Stay salty!



Jesus says even more. We are also the light of the world! Remember back in January, Pastor James reminded us to switch on the light when we walk into the room. Choose to be a light in a dark world. The hope you give may help dispel the darkness of fear. Your word of truth may help illuminate a gloomy path. Your conviction might challenge the shadow of sin. And like sunlight, your belief might even help someone grow.

We don't produce the light, but like the moon that reflects the light of the sun, we reflect the light of Jesus dwelling in our hearts. One hundred and fifty years ago, on a dark and stormy night, a large passenger boat cautiously edged toward a special harbor in Lake Erie, a haven where ships could obtain relief from the treacherous winds. The entrance to the inner harbor was lit with a row of lower lights, while a large lighthouse provided a beacon in the center. The captain knew that he could only find the harbor channel by keeping the lower shore lights in line with the main beacon. When they arrived, only the lighthouse shone through the darkness. "Are you sure this is the harbor?" asked the captain. "Quite sure, Sir," replied the pilot. "Where are the lower lights?" he asked. "Gone out, Sir!" was the reply. "Can we make the harbor?" the captain shouted. "We must or we will



perish, Sir", said the pilot. So the pilot turned the wheel, but in the darkness, he missed the channel. The boat crashed on the rocks and many lives were lost that night.

The newspaper that recounted the tragic story reported that the man in charge of the lower lights "didn't feel up to refilling the oil reservoirs". Since no one had ever mentioned that they used the lights, and since he wasn't feeling up to the work required, he let his duty slide that night. The tragedy inspired a great preacher of that time. "Brothers and sisters," he said, "The master will take care of the great lighthouse, let us keep the lower lights

burning.” Even now, some poor sailor, lost a terrible storm, might be trying to reach the harbor, so trim your lamp, keep your oil replenished and your light lit.



Jesus wants us to be little salts and lower lights for a good reason. We are to be salt and life for the earth and the world. They matter. Our faith is all about passing it on, as the old camp song goes--reaching others, embodying and expressing the Good



News for the sake of all God's people. Yes, our faith informs what we believe and how we feel, but it also affects who we are, how we act, what we say. But, for good reason...through us---what we say, how we treat others, the example we set---people will "taste and see" that the Lord is good! Get it? Taste the salt?! See the light?!

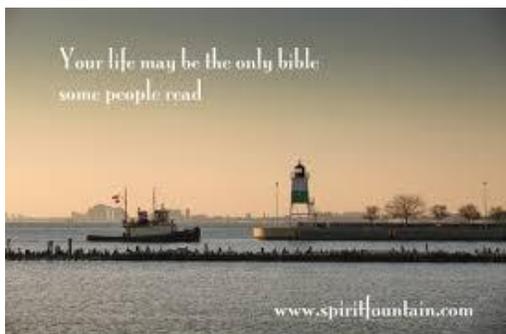


When we introduce a child to a new food, we let them taste and discover for themselves. "Try it," we say, "you'll like it!" They need to touch it, sample it, savor it. They need to **experience** what makes it delicious. This is how people learn about God too. They taste His grace through our love. They see His truth through our actions. **Your life might be the only Bible a person reads.** Mahatma Gandhi was

asked by Christian missionaries, "What is the biggest hindrance to the spread of Christianity in India?" His reply? Christians!

Oh that it were not so!

You see, how we behave, how we flavor, how we shine **makes a big difference** in how the



people around us taste and see God. What a big responsibility! Our verses this morning can be summed up in one word: **Influence** – You have influence. Everyone has influence, for good or for bad. We make a difference, whether we like it or not. As Christians, we need to make sure that our influence is positive and brings glory to God.



Every single one of us, little, big, young, old, rich, poor, every one of us makes a difference. We can choose to grumble or edify, to criticize or affirm, to gossip or respect. Even a person with nothing – no house, no job, nothing do to – has influence.

Fiona and I just read about a homeless man named Mookie who

spends his time helping others, fixing cars and patching roofs, usually for free. He doesn't worry about the future. This is how Mookie sees things: "It's simple really, he says, "I believe the trail you leave behind is more important than the path that lies ahead." Mookie understood that even he---homeless, poor, with nothing but a bike to his name---could choose to be salt and light, could make a difference for good. You do too!



Remember, the trail you leave behind is as important as the path ahead. How you season your life, how you reflect God's light makes a difference. Through what you say and do, how you live and love, people will taste and see that the Lord is good! So, may each of us and all of us leave a trail of salt behind us so that others may follow our Via Salaria, our Salt Road to the Kingdom of God. And may we keep our lower lights burning, so others may see, and navigate their way through the darkness to the One True Light!

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...Amen