

“Salt and Light”

The Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

Matthew 5: 13-20

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From the Pulpit

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*Prayer for Illumination: Holy God, by the power of your Spirit,
may these words fall fresh on our ears this day and
inspire the living out of our days. Amen*

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James Beard, Father of modern American cookery once asked, “Where would we be without salt?” Samin Nosrat, author of a New York Times Best Selling Cookbook, “Salt, Fat, Acid and Heat,”¹ says she knows the answer: (Where would we be without salt?) She says, “Adrift in a sea of blandness.”

It’s a lovely play on words, really. But who wants to be adrift in a sea of blandness. Bland becomes just plain-blah! Almost so Blah you have to spit it out--it tastes so bad. Bland can be an unadventurous dish, tasteless, flavorless, lifeless. Oatmeal, cream of wheat, mushy lima beans, dry toast, Mexican desert called Flan. Bland!-Blah!

In her best seller Nosrat writes, “Salt has a greater impact on flavor than any other ingredient... Learn to use it well...” While the cookbook goes on to describe the essential functions of all four elements, I find salt a really interesting subject. I am

¹ Nosrat, Samin. “Salt, Fat, Acid and Heat: Mastering the Elements of Good Cooking” Simon & Schuster (2017).

sure there are master classes in salt! There are over 14 types of salt used for flavoring food---in all colors and granular properties.

Salt's relationship to flavor is multidimensional: it has its own particular taste, and it enhances the flavor of the other ingredients. Used properly, salt minimizes bitterness, balances out sweetness, and enhances aromas, heightening our experiences of eating. For example, imagine taking a bite of a rich espresso brownie sprinkled with flaky sea salt. --The salt minimizes the espresso's bitterness and intensifies the flavor of chocolate, a welcome savory contrast to the sugar's sweetness.

The use of salt is an art and a science. Master its use and friends will ask you to share your culinary secrets.

Salt is fun too! Full of life! There is a salt mine in Hallstatt, Austria, a UNESCO World Heritage site. I once toured a 7000 year old salt mine. How is salt fun? Well, inside the mine, they have wooden slides to get tourists (of all ages) from one level of the mine tour to the next. Zip, Zip, down the tunnel we went through the cavernous space. This salt may be old, but it is anything but bland.

Bland can be part of a regimented diet. But bland describes "lacking in strong features or characteristics and therefore, uninteresting, dull or unremarkable." There are bland people in the world. Take Mr. Lorensax, the economics professor in Ferris Bueller's Day Off (1986)². He tries to cajole a less than

² Ferris Bueller's Day Off, (1986), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uhiCFdWeQfA>

interested high school class into a conversation about economic factors.

He says,

“In 1930 the Republican controlled House of Representatives in an effort to alleviate the effects of the [pause]

“Anyone, Anyone”...

“The GREAT DEPRESSION, passed the [Pause]

“Anyone, Anyone”....

“Hawley-Smoot Tariff Act, which did what, [Pause]

“Anyone, Anyone”

You get the idea. Ever been to a seminar when the presenter didn't capture your attention or she turned her back and read word for word from the slides? Bland! To which I respond---meh?

If something is bland-you tend to forget it or remedy it. Bland people give the impression they are comfortable, settled, everything in order. Bland people rarely make mistakes.

Salty people, however, make mistakes all the time. Salty people risk saying something they'll regret.

The term “Salty” as it turns out, has nothing to do with salt-and-pepper shakers. It doesn't have to do with being a salty dog, which is what an old sailor is called. It doesn't even have to do with using rude language.

According to Urban Dictionary, “salty” is when you’re “angry, agitated, ... upset,” or even bitter because of “being made fun of or embarrassed.” It can apply to someone “who feels out of place or is feeling attacked.”

Oftentimes saltiness stems from accepting your mistake or downfall in a situation, but resenting it nonetheless. Resentment, agitation, irritation... because of some humiliation or embarrassment. That’s what being salty means. But as blogger Mehak Anwar writes, of course, while being salty every now and then is totally natural (if not expected), living salty may not be the best for you, your friends, your family, or for everyone else in your community.³

Yep! Amen to that!

In the continuation of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus preaches to all those who have gathered, saying, “You are the salt of the earth,” But that’s not the same as being salty. In fact, I would submit, it’s just the opposite. One of the challenges of growing up in Christ and developing a mature faith is learning how to be the salt of the earth instead of giving in to being salty.

So let’s look at how Paul pulls that off as he writes to the people in the church in Corinth, in the passage that Jim read a few moments ago.

³ <https://muckrack.com/mehak-anwar>

Paul had every reason to feel salty. He put his heart and soul into starting that new church. He taught them about Jesus, treated them like they were his own children, doted on them. But instead of growing up, they were acting childish, fighting among themselves, choosing sides... They even started following other teachers, and treating him as if he were a fool, because Paul preached Christ crucified.

Paul could have felt rejected. He could have felt humiliated. He could have written them off. But he didn't. Instead, he claimed that "foolishness" almost as a point of pride, if that makes any sense. He writes, "I stood in front of you with weakness, fear, and a lot of shaking...." "I did that on purpose!" he says, "so that your faith might not depend on the wisdom of people but on the power of God."

Here's my take-away from reading Paul. His ego wasn't caught up in being right. He wasn't fighting for his personal pride. He wasn't full of himself. He didn't take slights personally, let alone try to retaliate. If he boasted, he boasted in the Lord. If he was going to fight for anything, it was the truth of the Gospel, not his own self-importance.

In other words, he practiced humility.

And couldn't we all rest in a little more humility in our week, let alone our world right now. Following the teachings of Jesus as God intended. We could use a few more people living their faith and radiating the light of God's love and grace and forgiveness into this place and into the world. A few more

people speaking up and speaking out for issues that matter in the Kingdom of God.

Gaining wisdom and maturity in Christ requires that we strive to hear what Jesus is telling the disciples some 2000 years ago. Salt and Light, both commodities in Jesus' time, sustain life---if you use them. Jesus' tone seems to include a bit of humor: pure sodium chloride does not deteriorate, and surely one wouldn't go through the effort of lighting a lamp just to hide it? The purpose of the commodity is in its use.

Jesus seems to be saying that our lives operate in a similar way: as a valuable resource to be poured out and never hidden. Perhaps the only thing keeping us from attending to the basic needs of the world in practical ways is our own barriers, our failure to spend ourselves and our resources freely.⁴

Professor Karoline Lewis suggests that “It is not enough to know about God. As disciples, we have to be the activity of God in the World. We are called to live out our identity as Salt and Light.”

“You are the salt of the earth,” Jesus tells his disciples. He didn't say, “Go be salt,” or “strive to be the salt of the earth,” or “if you follow me you will be the salt of the earth.” He said, “You *are* the salt of the earth.”

And then he said, “don't squander it. Don't take it for granted. Don't lose what you are, and what you have. Don't waste it

⁴ Kat Banakis, www.christiancentury.org. January 29, 2020, p19.

trying to be something else.” In fact, for us, that means we need to dig into our own spiritual journeys, our own walk and profession of faith and engage in the joy that Jesus offers. God delights in our delight and our job is to help bring joy into the world.

Because people who are salt of the earth? They are the light of the world. They are hope in the darkness. They are a gift from God. They help us see the way things are without judgment, without fear, without comparison or humiliation.

Growing up in Christ doesn't mean being superior – or inferior, for that matter. Maturity in Christ means being grounded and rooted so deeply in the love of God that we don't need to be haughty or arrogant or proud.⁵

We don't have to be “something” in order to be someone. We just need to be followers of Jesus, children of God - salt of the earth, light of the world, Jesus said. Just like the one who humbled himself, even to death on a cross.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

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⁵ Theme of Growing up in Christ inspired by a sermon series on “Adulthood” by Rev. Karen Chakoian of First Presbyterian Church, Granville, Ohio and other studies of “growing up in Christ.”