

“Salty Christians”
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Matthew 5:13-20

Did you hear the good news? Punxsutawney Phil did not see his shadow, thus predicting an early spring. I am sure we are all quite relieved now that we are assured that spring is just around the corner. Well, probably, not! While we would love to believe that Punxsutawney Phil’s prediction is gospel truth, the reality is that we are glad the salt trucks are still ready to roll. This has been a very long winter and, rather than putting our faith in a groundhog, we go out and buy more salt....if you can find it.

As you probably know, our office was closed for several days this week due to a power outage. Our custodian, Glenn Stevens, has salted our sidewalks with 14 forty pound bags of salt this winter. *How many of you salted your porch, sidewalk or driveway this past week?* Salt is good for thawing our frozen sidewalks and streets. Salt is needed for keeping us safe. When it comes to snowy and icy winters we don’t turn to Punxsutawney Phil for help but we do go for the salt.

Salt was also important in Jesus’ day and he uses salt as a description of who we are. This is how Jesus sees his followers....his apprentices. Read **Matthew 5:13-20**

¹³“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.” ¹⁴“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

¹⁷“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. ¹⁸For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹Therefore, whoever

breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. **The Word of the Lord....Thanks be to God!**

Salt! Having grown up in Kansas, I am well aware of the importance of salt! My home town of Hutchinson, Kansas, sits on top of an ocean of salt. You've heard of Carey, Morton and Barton Salt Companies but you may never have known that much of their salt is brought up from salt mines under my fair city. As a grade schooler, I remember going on field trips to the salt mines. As an adolescent boy we would dare each other to lick the walls. What's a boy going to do when you've been double dogged dared to lick the salt mine walls.....you lick the walls and, yes, it tastes just like salt. (I doubt teachers allow that sort of behavior anymore) Salt was such an important part of my hometown culture our High School mascot was the *Salthawk* which meant we were all Salthawks. I'm not talking about a small school.....there were over 500 in my graduating class. To show you how salt permeated our High School culture, the all girls cheering section for sporting events was called the *Briny Birds*. Let's hear it for the Salthawks!

Jesus recognized the value of salt. When he was looking for a metaphor to describe the people of his new community of faith he said, ***“You are the salt of the earth!”*** Why would Jesus have used salt as a metaphor for his followers? For what was salt used? We know it is used to thaw out that which is frozen today but I doubt Jesus had that in mind.

We know refrigeration was not available during Jesus' day and salt was used as a **preservative**. Salt kept meat from spoiling. Being the salt of the earth we are called to persevere in seeking justice, grace and mercy. As you give to the *Souper Bowl offering* or fill Back Packs for Kettering school students or serve the homeless at the House of Bread or as you stand up against the school bully or reach out to the one who is often overlooked in your sphere of influence you are the salt of the earth. Anytime we stand up against bigotry, racism, injustice, or anytime we seek mercy, offer kindness and walk humbly with God we are being the salt of the earth. Salt is a preservative!

In Jesus' day, as in ours, salt was used as an agent for **healing**. Just as we gargle with salt water to bring healing to a sore throat, so the ancients used salt to clean wounds or bring soothing relief to aches and pains. To this day the warm salt water of the Dead Sea is sought out for its restorative and medicinal qualities. Whenever we take time to listen to another's grief, walk with a friend through a crisis, visit the lonely, bring reconciliation to individuals at odds with one another or take food to someone who just came home from the hospital we are being the salt of the earth....agents of healing! Just as our bodies need salt for maintaining health, so the world needs the healing touch of you and me.....for we are the salt of the earth.

In Jesus' day as in our day, salt was used for **seasoning**. I understand that we are to be watchful about how much sodium we consume. Nevertheless, most would agree that salt brings out the flavor of food. Whenever we bring hope, joy, laughter, lift others' spirits or invite another to Christ's party we are being the salt of the earth.

But along with affirming his followers as the salt of the earth, Jesus states a warning when he says, ***“but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.”*** What is Jesus talking about when he suggests that salt might lose its taste? We know that salt cannot lose its taste. Sodium Chloride (NaCl) will always taste like salt. So, what's Jesus' point?

Even though salt cannot lose its saltiness, we Christians can lose ours! Think of a salt shaker. What good is it if you keep it in the kitchen cabinet and never use it? While the salt hasn't lost its saltiness, the salt is useless if it is left in the cabinet. What good are we as agents of preservation, healing or seasoning if we remain in the kitchen cabinet or simply associate with the same group of friends or stay in our cozy comfort zone and are never sprinkled into service?

Have you seen the salt shaker? There is a salt shaker filled with agents of preservation, healing and seasoning here in our sanctuary. But if we simply leave the salt where it is the ***“salt has lost its taste and it is no longer good for anything...”*** Until it is sprinkled into service!

Yes, Jesus calls us the salt of the earth but as we face the trials and stress of life both inside and outside the church we are prone to become tired, bored, burned out, or disillusioned. Before we know it we find ourselves more comfortable with that little cubby hole on the shelf and less interested in living out our calling as the salt of the earth. Jesus asked the question, *if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored?*”

Even though we are the salt of the earth it is not easy, given the distractions and the bumpy ride of life, to maintain our saltiness. We recognize that God’s Spirit is the One who refreshes our saltiness and the Spirit does so through the “*means of grace.*” So we read the Bible. So we pray. So we engage in spiritual conversation. So we come to worship where we sing, praise, hear the good news, engage in corporate and personal prayer, and partake in the sacraments.

We are in a special need of renewing our saltiness here at Fairmont. We are all coming to terms with significant loss and now is the time to be salt for one another. I love the words to the hymn “*God Is Here!*” and I offer it as a prayer as we prepare to receive the sacrament of holy communion as one of God’s gifts of grace. May this prayer restore our saltiness!

God is here! As we his people meet to offer praise and prayer, may we find in fuller measure what it is in Christ we share; here, as in the world around us, all our varied skills and arts wait the coming of his Spirit into open minds and hearts.

Here are symbols to remind us of our life-long need of grace; here are table, font and pulpit, here the cross has central place; here in honesty or preaching, here in silence as in speech, here in newness and renewal God the Spirit comes to each.

Here our children find a welcome in the Shepherd’s flock and fold; herre, as bread and wine are taken, Christ sustains us as of old; here the servants of the Servant seek in worship to explore what it means in daily living to believe and to adore.

Amen

