

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Matthew 5:13-20

"Be Salt"

Salt was something precious at the time of Jesus. Salt was scraped and gathered from sea shores, like the shore of the Dead Sea but it resulted in a salt that was absolutely chock full of impurities. Even with these impurities, it was used by people as a seasoning and as a preservative. But there was another use of salt that is not readily known.

As Jesus and the disciples went on the road from Jerusalem to Shechem, which is about 30 miles north of Jerusalem, they would see clay ovens built next to houses on the roadside. These kinds of ovens had been around even before Jesus' birth in Bethlehem. And each village had at least one large community oven for the whole village use.

What they burned in these ovens was not wood. They had to use something that was more readily available than wood - and so they used... animal dung. The young girls of the family had to learn how to collect fresh dung, mix salt into it, and then hand mold it into patties that were placed in the sun to dry. This was long before Purell! This same procedure continues to be used today in many of the third world countries.

I know your burning question must be - why was salt mixed with the dung in the first place? If you burned dung without a mixture of salt on the bare dirt floor of an oven it would not produce much heat. In these large community ovens, they would put a flat slab of salt as a base upon which the dried patties were placed. The bottoms of these large ovens were covered with a pretty thick layer of salt. Dried patties, mixed with salt and placed on a base of salt, gave off a pretty significant amount of heat.

Salt acts as a catalyst, significantly increasing the heat produced. A catalyst accelerates a chemical reaction and makes a change happen. Salt, mixed in the dung, becomes the additive that increases the heat given off in the burning. Eventually, the patties burn out. The salt base at the bottom of the oven ultimately loses its catalytic abilities and then becomes useless.

The salt base at the bottom of the oven then is removed from the oven and thrown in a very convenient place – the street. The useless salt is thrown over the existing road surface which improved the footing as people walked on the road.

Please turn to page 1505 in your Pew Bible to Matthew 5:13 *"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot."* Jesus said it is thrown out, thrown on the roadway, and trampled underfoot.

So if salt has lost its saltiness, lost its strength, it is no longer good for anything, but to be thrown out onto the roadway and trampled underfoot. Does that all make sense now? To understand why the salt which was a preservative – and so many things – but more importantly it explains how it was really used.

Jesus said that we are to *be salt*. I believe that Jesus meant for us to be catalysts, to be change agents, not just to add flavor to a conversation; we are people to make something happen by teaching and sharing God's Word with others. It is sad to think that a great deal of the world does not know Christ and so we are to be catalysts, we are to be Christ's change agents, we are to be Christ's salt.

To be the salt of the earth is to be the catalyst to start fires; spiritual fires for others. As Christians, as Disciples of Christ, we are to make hearts burn and long for Jesus.

You know some of the music that I will be playing next Sunday on 97.9 WDMG came from a time called Jesus Music – from the 1970's and the early 80's. They pulled no punches – no punches at all. They taught the Gospel, they sang the Gospel, believed the Gospel – trusting that the Holy Spirit was going to take that seed and break it open in the hearts of others. We talked about that last week! That is what we are supposed to do. It could be on the line at Harvey's, or on the line at Walmart – it could be anywhere. It is not necessarily what we say, but what we do; facial expressions, body language – speaks sometimes more than our words. We are to be salt, we are to be Christ's salt.

In Paul's letter to the Romans 10:13 Paul writes "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Paul perfectly quotes the prophet Joel 2:32. The apostle Peter also quotes this same passage from Joel in his sermon to the people on the Day of Pentecost – when 3,000 people came to Christ! Three times in Holy Scripture we meet this very same passage and according to biblical studies, three times is an undisputable affirmation of the truth and efficacy of these words. We are to believe them! *"Whoever calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved."*

But Paul clarifies things in the very next verse, verse 14, in which he raises some very good questions, questions having a direct bearing on whom we are as change agent Christians. Paul asks three questions, *"How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in?" "How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?" "And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?"* (Romans 10:14 NIV)

If people are not taught the Word of God, if people do not hear the Word of God preached, then how can we expect others to be brought to Christ? And then Paul asks the 64 million dollar question, *"How can they preach unless they are sent?"* This question brings to mind that wonderful passage from James 2:26, "Faith without works, faith without proof of that faith, faith without action coming out of that faith, faith without bearing fruit of that faith, is ... dead."

Paul then makes the statement which is taken directly from the prophet Isaiah 52:7, *"How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"* (Romans 10:15) For Isaiah, reception of

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this good news was given when the Hebrew people received welcomed news that King Cyrus granted permission for the Jewish people to leave Babylon and return to their homeland. Yes, despite what you hear in the news - Israel is the Jewish People's Homeland! It was given to them by God the Father. It is no one else's. SO, they received the great news that they would return from a 40-year exile in Babylon. Can we begin to fathom the joy and jubilation that arose in the hearts of those people upon hearing that good news: "They were going home!"

It is with this same joy and delight that we are to be the salt of the earth; that we are to be the catalyst for bringing others to Jesus Christ, that we are to teach, to preach and through our example we are to spread the good news of Jesus Christ, for through His sacrificial love for us, we are going to go home to be with Him for all eternity. Praise the Lord! *"How beautiful are the feet of those who bring this news of salvation to the people."* Special words from Isaiah, Joel, and Paul. We are to be TODAY'S feet who bring the "Good News" of salvation to the people of the world.

There are many Sunday worshippers who leave it up to the clergy to lead souls to Christ? Yes, clergy have a role in evangelizing the world, but to assume they are alone in this ministry and are solely responsible for converting souls for Christ is a sad falsehood.

So, the question I have for you to ponder about this (afternoon) morning – as a pre-game exercise is: "How many souls have you led to receive the Good News of the redeeming love and sacrifice of Jesus Christ? How many souls have you led to Christ?" Can you just imagine the impact on this parish if each one of us brought just one person to Christ and to this parish? All of heaven would be dancing and rejoicing, for we would be doing what Jesus commanded us to do: "Be salt; be catalysts, be change agents in the lives and hearts of those who are lost."

The need for teaching, for sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ, is more critical than ever. You don't have to do it by thumping a Bible in somebody's face! Do you know how important it is to just touch someone on the shoulder when you can see they are having a bad day? Just to let them know that you care? People are hungry for the Word of God and sadly so many people are not being fed. This is nothing new. Some of you have personally witnessed Christ working, not only in your own lives but in other people's lives. And you have also witnessed the lack of teaching the Word of God from friends and neighbors as well.

We are called, we are commanded, and we are expected by Jesus to share His Word. Each one of us is called to teach the Good News so that those who hear may believe, and those who believe may receive Christ, and those who receive Christ may receive eternal salvation.

The Christian faith is not ours to hoard or to covet, not ours to be selfish about, because by doing so we will be held accountable for violating the 10th Commandment. We will be held guilty of holding the Christian faith up as an idol to claim as only our own. Our faith is meant to be shared, to be given away. Michael W. Smith, a famous Christian Artist has a great song called "Love's not love until you give it away." Jesus displayed this truth when He hung from

the cross giving His life and love for you and me. Paul sums it up this way: *“faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”* (Romans 10:17)

Just as God reached out beyond Himself to create and to love us, so are we called to reach out to others, to love and teach others the redeeming love of Christ. If we are not reaching out to others, we are not a reflection of the true loving image of God (we all know that we are made in the image and likeness of God) and we also know that we are not a reflection of God’s true loving nature and character.

In last week’s sermon I reminded you of the Great Co-Mission in which Jesus said: *“Go therefore and make disciple of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

Jesus has taken away any excuse we may want to use for not doing as He commanded, for He said that *“I am with you always...”* What greater help do we need? Jesus said, *“Be salt!”* Be a catalyst, be the change agents that Jesus expects you to be. Accept the mission to bring souls to Jesus Christ, and He will bless you with the enabling presence of His Holy Spirit. It is our Great Co-Mission. Be salt!