

5th Sunday after Epiphany      2/5/17  
Matthew 5:13-20                      A

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.

Back in the days of Jesus, salt was a big deal. In our day, it may seem that what we know of salt is that our doctor tells us to avoid it, but back in the days of Jesus, salt was precious and valuable because of the many ways in which it was used.

One of the things salt was used for was flavoring food, just like it is today. You know, when your cooking has the texture and taste of baby food asparagus, you reach for salt and pepper, to flavor it. This is nothing new. Even Job talks about this, "Can that which is tasteless be eaten without salt, or is there any taste in the juice of the mallow" (Jo 6:6)? Salt is a common flavoring for food, but that's not the only way it is used.

Back in the days of Jesus, the local Ace hardware store did not carry the latest model of side-by-side refrigerator, complete with ice maker and filtered water dispenser, mainly because it hadn't been invented yet. So back in those days, if you wanted to preserve food, you salted it. Salt prevented your food from decaying and spoiling. Salt makes a wonderful preservative.

Salt also had another amazing property for which it was widely used in those days. Salt was wonderful for healing. When a baby was born, it was given a bath in salt water to ward off infection. Even today, we still use salt for this sort of thing. Get a cold, and you can go out and buy one of

those things that shoots saline solution up your nose to keep it moist. Get a sore throat, and what do you do? You gargle with salt water.

The other thing about salt in those days was that it was a major part of the economy. People would actually get paid in salt. In fact, our word “salary” literally comes from the Latin “salt money”. When you hear the expression, “That man is worth his salt,” it means that the person has done their job in such a way that they are worthy of their wages.

In Jesus’ day, salt was a pretty big deal. It was valuable, precious, and a much-needed commodity. Let me take a guess at what you are thinking about right now, “Jeez, Pastor, thanks for the info, but why are you telling me this? What has this got to do with me?” The reason, Dear Child of God, I’m telling you all this stuff about salt is that it helps you understand what Jesus says about YOU.

Notice what Jesus says. “You are the salt of the earth”. It’s interesting what He says, isn’t it? He doesn’t say, “Please be the salt of the earth”. He doesn’t say, “You can be the salt of the earth if you really try”. Nor does He say, “You need to become the salt of the earth”. No, He says, “You are the salt of the earth”. That is your nature, that is who and what you are in Christ; you are a precious and valuable quantity upon the earth today.

Take a look at the earth today. Take a look at the people on the earth today. They want flavor in their life and it seems they will try anything, do anything, to make it happen. People get a bad case of the “Keeping up with the Jones’,” so they go out and buy some toy they really don’t need, and now have a debt they can’t pay. They abuse alcohol, or develop a drug habit. They look at pornography, because that woman would make them oh-so-much happier than the wife God has given them.

Or, they actually do carry on that secret affair with Mr. Wonderful, who is nothing like that ... Neanderthal ... you are married to. People will lie and steal and cheat. They will do anything to add some flavor, some excitement, to their lives.

And it all seems to taste so good. At least, at first. But when it is all said and done, you realize the sins you've committed and the people you've hurt, and you are left a bitter taste in your mouth.

That inbred sin we have been born with, shows itself in sins against God and sins against our neighbor and it all leads to death. But, you, you are the salt of the earth, and that means that you go out into the world with the healing Gospel of Jesus Christ. That's why you are in the world.

People turned away from God, but the GOOD NEWS of the Gospel is that God so loved the world that He sent His only-begotten Son into the flesh, to take on all of your sins of thought, word, and deed. And He gave Himself up upon the cross as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of all the world. Rejoice and Be glad, Dear Child, your sins are gone in Christ Jesus.

Again, I invite you to take a look at the people of the earth. You know they are hurting. You know they are suffering. They weighed down by grief and guilt, disappointment and despair. They are confused and afraid in the darkness. They are afflicted with disease and infirmity.

Again, I invite you to take a look at the earth, and you will see sin, suffering, spoilage, rot, and decay. And you will remember that this earth is destined for destruction. You've seen the signs -- the wars and rumors of wars, kingdom against kingdom, family member hating another member of their own family, famines, earthquakes, terrorist attacks, false teachers and false saviors, lawlessness in the streets of our nation. All this is a sign the earth is rotting away and is destined for destruction.

But, you are baptized and live in Christ, and because you do, you are salt of the earth; you are the light of the world. One of the reasons the earth has not come to an end yet is because you're in it. You are the ones who go around sprinkling the love of God in Christ Jesus around, so that people can be forgiven, know the peace, and joy, and comfort of Jesus, and be saved when the end comes, along with you.

Let me give you an illustration. I read a great interview this past week. One of our LCMS pastors, an African-American named Rev. Keith Haney, has written a great Bible study, "One Nation Under God: Healing Racial Division in America" which when we see the unrest in our nation, I believe is a topic that needs to be addressed. His advice to Christians?

"Only God's love can tone down the rhetoric. Only God's love can drive out fear. . . . Replace the darkness of hatred with divine light. Replace the destructive speeches with a message of hope."

You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. You are the ones who have been flavored by the love of God in Jesus Christ. How valuable you are!

But, notice those words of Jesus, "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" (v. 13b). Salt loses its taste, its flavor, when it comes contaminated by foreign elements. We are in the world, but we dare not be of the world, because if we are of the world, we are not good for anything. To keep us from becoming OF the world, the Lord Jesus comes to you, Dear Child of God, to flavor you, to preserve you, to heal you, and He does that by means of His Word, your Baptism, His life-giving Body and Blood that you eat and drink here at His table. Through these means, He keeps you exactly what you are -- those

flavored, those preserved, those sent into the world, for you are the salt of the earth, that is how valuable and wonderful you are.