

Matthew 5:13-20  
5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany  
February 9, 2020—Shepherd of the Mountains, Pinetop, AZ

INI

Jesus' words this morning come right after the beatitudes we heard last week when He tells of all of the present and future blessings the people have. The words last week were Gospel. They were good news proclaiming the blessings we already have in Christ as well as the blessings we look forward to at His return. And we learn that all of those blessings spring from Jesus' cross and His empty tomb. And now He starts telling us more about how we are blessed so that we will be a blessing to others. That's always the case with God's blessings. We are blessed to be a blessing.

**"You are the salt of the earth,"** He says. Before we dive in, we need to talk about the grammar of the text. We often tend to think of this in the same way we often think of those beatitudes. If we do this, then we will be come blessed. If we do this, then we will become salt. But again, the verbs are present tense. You *are* the salt of the earth.

And before we jump into what it means to be salty, we again need to focus on the grammar. Things often get lost a little in translation. Jesus doesn't merely say "you are the salt of the earth." He says, "*you yourselves* are the salt of the earth." The "you" of the verb is emphatic. He is speaking to His disciples. He is telling them that they are, not other people, His disciples are the salt. Which means He also is speaking to us, His 2020 disciples. And to us He says, **"you yourselves are the salt of the earth."**

So, what does it mean for us to be salty? If you were to pick up any biblical commentary, you would find examples of salt's use. For example, before refrigeration, salt was used in the preservation of foods. It is also used as a flavor enhancer. In the ancient world its preservative properties as well as its use as a condiment made it very valuable, so valuable in fact that sometimes in the ancient world, wages were paid in salt. This is where we get the term "salary."

In modern times, it is still a condiment, but it is also useful for other things. We can use it to melt ice on our sidewalks and driveway. Or think of the last time you spent some time in or visited someone spending time in a hospital. That clear bag hanging over their head with a cord going to their arm likely had salt in it. The saline solution in the I.V. helps to both hydrate and maintain electrolyte levels in the body. You might even have a little bottle of similar stuff that you squirt in your eye or use to rinse your contacts.

Dr. Gibbs' commentary on Matthew lists 12 different ways that salt was commonly used in the Bible and in the rest of the ancient world. Salt has always been and still is very useful and very valuable, even if inexpensive in modern times. Yet, Jesus says, if salt has become  $\mu\omega\rho\alpha\iota\nu\omega$  or  $\mu\omega\rho\acute{o}\varsigma$  (related to the words moron or foolish) if salt has become foolish, moronic, useless, not salty what good is it?

If you are a responsible shopper, one of the things you always check on the food labels at the store is the expiration date. I have here a container of Morton iodized salt. If you look at the bottom of it you can find a manufacturing stamp. On the label is printed the contents, how much of it is there, the nutritional facts and the ingredient list. But unless your package of salt has some other herbs and spices mixed in, you won't find an expiration date on salt.

So, if Jesus compares us to salt, if He says that He has made us salt through the blessings He gives (namely the Gospel, salvation by faith in His complete forgiveness earned for us on the cross) how do we become "unsalty"...especially if salt is always salty?

I like to do a lot of cooking. Other than the amount of meat to use and a general idea of main ingredients, I typically don't follow recipes. When it comes to seasoning, I just go by taste. I add a little of this and taste, then add a little of that and taste again. I don't know if I have ever used some of the spices in my spice rack. Some of them just sit there, unused, getting stale. But what's the

one ingredient I always reach for when cooking my main dishes? Salt. Food needs salt. Sometimes you add more or less depending upon how salty the other ingredients already are, but salt is always used.

And that is the key to what Jesus is saying. His disciples are salt. Salt has a function. Salt is meant to be used. Jesus' disciples, including you yourselves and I myself, have a use, a purpose. We are made into salt so that we can salt the world. He goes on to use the metaphor of light. **"You yourselves are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house."** And we can apply that same thing to the salt. Nobody keeps the salt shaker sitting locked away in a closet. Instead they sprinkle it on their food. They season their dishes with it so that all can enjoy its flavor.

Disciples, like salt, have a function to perform. What is this function? Well this is where Jesus says things that go against our Lutheran sensibilities, but they are one of the core behaviors of Christianity. Jesus says to do \*gasp\* good works.

But wait a minute, Jesus, in the next chapter of Matthew, You're going to tell us not to practice our righteousness before others. You're going to tell us to not even let our left hand know what our right hand is doing. What gives? Which is it? Do or do not?

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, good works were always the plan. When Adam and Eve were first formed they were given good works to do. Then they messed it up. But God's Law, the smallest jots and tittles of it still remain. We are made for good works. We are meant to do good works. They can't get us up a ladder to heaven. They can't earn our salvation. God had no need of our good works. But our neighbor does. And as we carry out our good works as the salt of the earth, as the light set on a hill, we distinguish ourselves from the hypocrites of chapter 6 because we do it for the benefit of our neighbor, not ourselves, and for the glory of the Father, not our own vainglory. In doing good works that spring from faith, we **let [our] light shine before others, so that they may see [our] good works and give glory to [our] Father who is in heaven.** That is how we remain salty salt. We glorify God by serving Him. And we serve Him by serving our brothers and sisters.

What does this look like for us ourselves? I don't know. It's different for each of us. Maybe it's throwing down the salt of words seasoned in love to melt the barrier in an iced over relationship. Maybe it's speaking the Gospel to someone who doesn't know Jesus yet and thus making them salty disciples too. Maybe it's an extra sprinkling of the Gospel on someone who has already been blessed by Christ's love, but is struggling in their faith. Maybe it's making sure you are the salt of someone committed to God's Word instead of offering the sugar of the world as you confront them with behaviors that aren't OK. Maybe it's admitting you are wrong when another salty Christian catches and confronts you with your own sin.

Regardless of the way that you see it working in your lives as you pour out of this salt shaker of a church on Sunday morning to salt the world the rest of the week, it all starts with remembering that you yourselves are salt. You have been made that way by Jesus, by His Word, by His Sacraments. Sure, there are days when after leaving here our saltiness will be diluted by other flavors—bitter doubt, sour distraction, or other sweet competing desires. But as long as you are in Christ, you are His disciples. And you are His salt, simply by faith, not by works. But His salt is not meant simply for the spice rack. It is meant to get to work, to season, and to preserve.

So, let us salt the earth, doing the good works **which God has prepared before hand that we should walk in them** <sup>Ephesians 2:10</sup> so that others may see His light in us, and come to know the love and forgiveness that we already celebrate, and give glory to our Father who is in heaven. Amen.