

Scripture:

Psalm 112

Matthew 5:13-20

“Salt of the earth.”

Salt ----- the only mineral that human beings can take directly from the earth and eat.

Salt --- we would die without it.

Salt --- humans have tended to build communities either around sources of salt or around routes and roads where salt was traded commercially.

Indeed salt used to be used the way we use money --- in fact the word salary --- comes from the root of the word salt.

The earliest roads were built with transporting salt in mind.

The earliest taxes were levied on salt.

Numerous military campaigns have been launched to preserve salt and salt sources.

Venice was largely built through the salt trade --- the salt lagoons of Venice were legendary --- and it soon became one of the major European cities.

Many have argued that Gandhi brought independence to India in the last century through salt trade.

Closer to home --- and speaking practically --- much of the food we eat would be far more dull and lifeless if it were not for salt.

Indeed many people can handle as much salt as they want ----- our is the first generation to monitor salt intake.

The average North American consumes over 200 shakes of salt per day --- or 10,000 plus milligrams.

Salt is virtually indispensable to good food.

It sharpens and highlights and draws out flavours and aromas.

It controls the ripening of cheese ---- it preserves meats and fishes --- it strengthens gluten in bread --- it's an integral part of much of the food we eat and prepare.

I think it's safe to say we all have salt and we all use salt on a regular basis.

Indeed the Episcopal priest Robert Farrar Capon went so far as to say of salt --- that it is the --- "music of cookery, the indispensable bass line over which all tastes and smells form their harmonies."

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The importance of salt for human beings --- for the planet --- for animals plants and humans cannot be overstated ---- simply put --- without it we would die.

And so this phrase of Jesus --- "You are the salt of the earth." ---- one that we've become so familiar with --- is really quite striking.

If we consider it for a minute --- is Jesus is saying something like --- "You are like the cloudy white crystals ---- or chunky pinkish red deposits --- that ooze out of the earth --- and preserve and enhance flavour."

Jesus not doubt turned a few heads when He said --- "You are the salt of the earth."

What does it actually mean to say ---- "You are the salt of the earth?"

What does it mean to refer to someone --- or a group of people even --- as --- ----- salt of the earth?

Well ---- here are a few possibilities:

- a simple person
- a thoroughly decent person
- a good honest person

---- a person who is representative of the best or noblest elements in humanity

And then there is the urban dictionary ---- it refers to salt of the earth as ---- “a common hard working person” --- I’m not really sure this one quite captures it all but for some maybe it does.

Doesn’t salt of the earth mean much more than just --- a common hard working person”?

What about salt of the earth as ---- the most worthy of people.

The best of the best.

An exemplary person --- commendable --- laudable --- meritorious ----- honourable.

Isn’t salt of the earth kind of like the highest compliment you can get or give.

I think it might be --- or at the very least --- it’s pretty high up there in terms what you can say about a person.

To call someone salt of the earth --- kind of means the best of the best doesn’t it? --- a faithful humble hard working quietly going about the business of building the kingdom of God kind of person.

If at the end of our days we could be described as salt of the earth wouldn’t that be enough ----- wouldn’t that be something ----- wouldn’t that be one of --- if not the highest compliment you could get.

So what does it mean --- Jesus saying --- “You are the salt of the earth?”

Not you will become --- or you are like --- but you are ----- the salt of the earth.

Sitting salt is useless --- sitting not being used salt is useless.

Salt that sits in its’ container --- never used --- never shaken or mixed in with anything else --- is useless.

No one ever stepped into someone's kitchen and said --- wow they've got salt just sitting there in a big jar --- they must be quite the cook --- look at all that salt.

Yes it's common ---- yes we all have it in our kitchens ---- but it requires just the right amount to be effective --- too little and you barely taste it --- too much and the dish is ruined.

Salt only ever means anything when it is mixed in with other things.

We can all agree with that I'm sure --- salt only ever means anything when it is mixed in with other things --- by itself we would never just sit back and shake a few crystals in our mouths.

But once it's mixed in it enlivens --- and heightens --- it elaborates --- and draws things out.

Things like --- flavours and aromas --- tastes and smells that lay dormant --- suddenly dance on our pallets --- when we add salt to them.

“You are the salt of the earth.”

Maybe it means we have a savory task --- a savory gospel task of making the world a better place --- maybe we are called to ensure that we get mixed up with and in the world --- and don't just sit on the sidelines in the box or on the shelf.

Maybe part of what Jesus is saying is that it's not enough to work just inside the church --- or church community --- maybe it's not just enough to nurture a strong interior life of spirituality --- and that we also have to pour out ourselves onto the earth ----- into the world in order to bring out --- enhance --- bring to life --- the complex and beautiful flavours of life.

To be true salt we have to mix into the world --- and spread gospel flavours.

You are the salt of the earth --- you are the one's who bring flavour and enhance --- bringing to life what otherwise might just be half alive.

You are the ones who add a little shake of the kingdom of God to everything making it better and more beautiful ---- more savoury and aromatic.

You are the preserves of life ---- without you --- there will only be death.

You are the one's the world cannot live without --- you are the ones without which things will go bad and rot out.

You are the one's who shape how the world is built ---- roads --- cities ---- without you the world doesn't function --- or without you at least the world doesn't function as God so intends it.

Maybe that's it --- maybe the salt of the earth are those who enable and promote ---- the unfolding and establishment of the will of God.

The salt of the earth are those who enable and promote the will of God.

That's a definition and an understanding that I can live with.

You are the little grains of savour and flavour that without which life is dull --- and bland -- and will eventually even rot out --- go bad.

You are the little grains of savour and flavour without which there is ultimately only ever death.

We die without enough salt ----- the kingdom of God dies without enough disciples shaking and spreading the gospel ----- mixing it in.

O.K so maybe we got a handle on the whole salt of the world thing ---- but what about the light of the world.

In verse 13 from Matthew's gospel it's --- "You are the salt of the earth." --- and then in verse 14 it's ---- "You are the light of the world."

Add flavour and savour ---- bring to life --- draw out enhance --- bring alive ----- salt ---- and now it's light of the world ---- shed light --- enable people to see better and more clearly.

Salt is useless just left sitting by itself in the box or on the shelf --- it comes to life when it is added to something.

Light is useless if it is stuffed under a bowl --- or in a box ---- or in a closet -  
-- hidden or covered up.

Maybe part of what Jesus is saying is that when we privatize our faith ---  
keep it tucked away quietly --- where no one can see it ---- under a bowl ---  
it becomes far less than ideal --- losing its effectiveness.

Maybe Jesus is posting a call to discipleship and cautioning us against a  
privatized --- hidden --- tucked off to the side --- part time --- kind of faith.

And then of course there is the falling away --- gone stone cold kind of  
relationship with Christ too.

The salt losing its saltiness kind of relationship.

If I'm connected just a wee bit ---- isn't that better than nothing?

And in a way yes ---- something is better than nothing.

But --- salt lose its saltiness.

Disconnected and broken off from the inner core ---- salt can ----- and does  
lose its saltiness.

Broken off ---- disconnected from our rock --- the inner core of our faith ----  
--- we too lose our savour and saltiness.

Broken off ---- disconnected from our rock --- the inner core of our faith ---  
we soon become flat and lifeless.

A light jammed under a bowl --- stuffed into a closet --- hidden away ----  
ceases to be of any use.

Salt broken away from its core --- disconnected ----- is like the ember from a  
fire --- it slowly goes cool and ceases to produce heat ----- but as soon as its  
put back in the fire it very quickly produces light and heat once again.

Salt and light are meant to be shared and exercised.

Left dormant or hidden --- broken away from their source ---- they soon lose their effectiveness.

And as Jesus makes clear in the next section in Matthew's gospel --- the second half of our reading for today ---- it's never just take some and leave others --- when it comes to faith.

Verse 19 ---- "Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

We can't just pick or chose when it comes to what Jesus asks of us.

Take the stuff that we find a little easier and just pass by the more challenging stuff --- thinking it doesn't apply to us.

For example --- we can't just pick through the Ten Commandments and choose which ones apply to us and by pass the other ones --- they all apply.

But before we become discouraged --- notice the words Jesus chooses ---- "whoever practices and teaches these".

"Whoever practices and teaches these...."

It's not whoever perfects these --- or whoever is without fault --- but it's whoever practices and teaches.

Jesus wants us to practice and teach --- to practice and to invite others to practice by teaching and sharing with them.

Perfection is never part of what Jesus asks.

He knows far to well that that's never going to happen --- otherwise He wouldn't have had come in the first place.

Practice and teach --- be savory ---- enhance this life --- make the world just a little bit better place --- just as salt makes so many dishes just a little better and richer and more beautiful.

And ---- shed light --- shine God's light and love and will and way --- illuminate the path --- make things clearer ----- open up the way of the will of God.

Be a good honest person.

Be thoroughly decent --- chose grace over judgment.

Choose love over fear and hate.

Work on yourself first --- then maybe --- maybe others.

But work on yourself for a while --- a long while --- help others yes for sure ---- but never neglect working on yourself.

And as you do ---- shed some light on Jesus --- don't hide Him away --- or cover Him up --- or minimize Him.

Stay connected to and with Him --- point Him out ---- share Him.

He's already all around --- working ---- witnessing --- reconciling --- redeeming ---- making new --- taking what looks lost --- over and done with --- and making something new and beautiful and inspiring and true.

Just shed a little light on what He ---- Jesus is doing ---- as you humbly go about all that humans go about doing.

Yes there are exceptional human beings --- saints and prophets ---- that grace creation --- and are held up and recognized --- Desmond Tutu --- Mother Theresa ---- Henry Nouwen ---- Jean Vanier --- and so on --- to name a few in the last 20 or 30 years.

But we're not all expected to be that exceptional that remarkable ----- we are simply and humbly called to be faithful little crystals of salt and beams of light.

Shining and enhancing --- enriching and sharing and celebrating the love of God.

We are all capable of being faithful little crystals of salt ---- and radiant little beams of light.

Enhancing things juts a little bit with the gospel --- shedding just a little bit of gospel light of things.

“Do this in remembrance of me.” --- Jesus said --- and so we do.

“You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.” --- Jesus said --- and so we are.

Don't pick and choose one commandment over another --- or leave this one out ----- and count that one in --- and so we don't.

It's ----- love God and then love neighbour --- and in that order --- God first --- neighbour second ----- and so we do --- or at least try to as best as we can.

Practice and teach Jesus says ---- not be perfect and judge ---- because perfection and judging have nothing to do with being human --- instead it's practice and teach.

Do --- and share what you are trying to do --- and why you are trying to do it.

Be salt --- enhance --- uplift --- make better --- be essential --- don't lose what's essential.

And then it's and don't hide me away --- close me off ---- or push me aside.

Jesus gives us the greatest of compliments in Matthew's gospel today.

“You are the salt of the earth.” ----- He says.

You are essential ---- and good ----- and you have the ability to lift things up --- make them taste and smell batter --- make them be better --- so don't hide this way ---- instead exercise it --- celebrate it --- share it --- hold it up in all it's radiant beauty.

Yes we may be mixed up --- full of disproportioned passions --- and needs and wants --- contradictory and sometimes weak --- broken in our own ways.

But Jesus comes to us and says --- you're beautiful ---- and you're essential.

We're all beautiful and we're all essential --- we're all salt.

We all somehow are blessed with the innate ability and responsibility to make things better ---- and do good --- be good --- walking humbly.

Salt of the earth:

--- a simple person

--- a thoroughly decent person

--- a good honest person

---- a person who is representative of the best and noblest elements

“Salt of the earth.” --- “a common hard working person”

And more.

---- the most worthy ---- the best of the best.

Exemplary --- commendable --- laudable --- meritorious ---- honourable.

“You are the salt of the earth.” --- is perhaps the highest compliment you can get --- and that's what Jesus says of us.

Jesus thinks pretty highly of us --- He knows we are capable of great and beautiful things --- broken as we are.

You are blessed Jesus says in the beginning of this great series of teachings -  
-- Matthew 5-7 The Sermon on the Mount.

And now in this second section --- Matthew 5 --- 13-20.

You are blessed He first says --- and now here it's --- “You are amazing and essential --- you are capable of beautiful things --- you can make a difference and you can shed light on things.

And of course Jesus elaborates on this --- see the next section in Matthew 5 --  
- come back again next week we'll explore it a bit.

But --- for today it's ---- be salt and light.

God's message for us today is make better --- be faithful --- improve ----  
enhance ---- shed light on.

God has blessed us with so very much ----- His richness ---- His love --- His  
compassion --- His forgiveness ---- His mercy ---- and we are capable of  
being light and salt ---- mixing in with the world --- changing things up on  
account of the gospel.

As followers of Christ --- we have light to share with the world.

And we know this not because we're full of ourselves ---- but because Jesus  
told us so.

Jesus invites us to think of ourselves as the salt of the earth.

That is how much God loves us --- that He sees us as essential as salt.

When God looks at us He sees great enhancers --- and improvers --- the way  
just the right amount of salt at the right time --- enhances and improves.

We are blessed ---- and we are blessed with the capacity --- to bless.

According to Jesus --- and the rose colored glasses that He sees us through --  
-- the loving eyes he sees us through ----- we are salt and we are light.

And that for sure is a gospel blessing.

“Let your light shine before others that they may see your good deeds and  
glorify your Father in heaven.”

Amen.