

"Have Salt in Yourselves"

Mark 9:38-50

September 27, 2009 – Proper 21B

The Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church

Mark 9:38-50

John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." But Jesus said, "Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us. For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.

"If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

"For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

Prayer.

Salty people.

I've come across a few over the past 48 years.

There once was a father named Ira

Who put his job on hold,

Pitched a tent and moved in for a year

To serve as a superintendent of works

Building the new church building on North Main Street.

That example served his son, Joseph, well;

And his salt

salted me.

I sat one time unpolished in a classroom led by Kathy

Who opened up Hebrew scriptures to me

Unlike any scholar, teacher, or preacher from my experience,

As if I was experiencing the scripture again for the first time.

She taught me that exceptional scholarship was gender neutral,

That sacred often means something more than literal,

And that meaning is worth the effort of exploration.

"Have Salt in Yourselves"

Mark 9:38-50

September 27, 2009 – Proper 21B

© The Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

[Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church](#)

She salted me
Even as I have tried to salt my members and friends entrusted to me.
A number of men salted me once,
Bill, Pete, Les, and Bill.
A logger, a student, a preacher, and a pipe fitter.
One had lost a son to cancer.
Another would die of cancer.
One would graduate only to have his life cut short.
The other had a stroke and slowly fades away.
They taught me to fish;
But more than fishing,
Their salt taught me patience,
Listening to silence,
The beauty of the cast,
The blessing of every fish.
Their salt
Flavored me,
Even as they salted the youth who attend our fishing camps.

In many ways I cannot help but wonder
If in our world today
We've confused our spices;
Developed a mistaken assumption
That ranting and raging,
spewing exaggerations, lies, in-tolerance, and partisanship
is being salty.
It isn't.
A better metaphor for uncivilized behavior might be pepper.
Cayenne pepper.
Casting out demons in the name of Jesus is being salty.
Guiding one another through the trials and temptations of life,
Avoiding the pitfalls that await the distracted or weak of heart,
Staying on the pathway that leads to Jesus and the Promised Land;
That is being salty.

There are more than two spices in the rack.
The Apostle Paul rightly observes in the first century church
The mistaken assumption that one can earn their way into heaven,
Salvation by works, as it were –
That if I work enough Turkey dinners,
Put a twenty in the plate every now and then,
And never get arrested or sent to jail –
That I'll earn my way into the Promised Land –
That righteous living became confused with being salty.

It isn't.

A better metaphor for good works and acts of charity might be cinnamon;
A valuable addition to the spice rack,
Without a doubt,
but hardly salt.

Returning to the well of faith
To drink in belief in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior,
In spite of a secular, unbelieving world,
That's being salty.

Believing in the miraculous intervention of an all loving and all powerful God,
That a potentially fatal fall only resulted in a broken scapula,
Because the Lord was "Looking out for me,"
That's being salty.

Praying makes one salty.
Singing songs of praise
seasons the faith with just the right amount of salt.
Leading the wandering stray back into the fold
Or welcoming the new stranger,
That's being salty.

Having the courage to confess sins,
Believing in divine forgiveness and absolution,
Now that's what I'm talking about-
That's being salty.

"Salt," Jesus proclaims,
"is good;
but if salt has lost its saltiness,
how can you season it?"
Without taste,
Salt becomes just another crystallized mineral
Useful for paving roads.
What Jesus is uncovering here,
I believe,
In this teachable moment with his disciples,
Is the importance of wedding together
a life of servant discipleship
With a life of regular self-assessment.
Periodically asking the question,
"where have I been?
Where am I now?
And where is my journey of faith leading me?"
Based on previous experience
And current skill set,
What goals can be set that God is calling on me to accomplish?

To read scripture and pray daily?
To worship weekly?
To put my faith to work
By reaching out to the last, the lost, the least?
That's being salty.
Take this beyond the individual
And apply salty living to the communal.
The church should see itself in the business of
Servant discipleship and regular self-assessment.
Where are we now
And towards what is God calling?
It may be more of the same,
But if we never ask the question,
We will miss each new creative call of the Spirit
And God's will
Will be left unfulfilled.
Ask.
Expect an answer.
That's being salty.

Every spice in the rack has its place.
At the risk of pushing the metaphor too far
Seasoning requires a tried and true recipe,
The discipline to stick to it
And avoid under
or over seasoning the pot
and ruining the food.
Salt preserves.
Salt enhances.
Being the salt of the world for Christ's sake?
This, my beloved,
Is our destiny.
Amen.