



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. **AMEN!**

On a Monday quite some time ago I went to Minocqua to my text study with several other pastors. We began by reading our Gospel text for today. One of the pastors said that the reading spoke to him about teaching as the lesson begins with John addressing Jesus as teacher. And even the Psalm for the day talks about the teaching of the Lord. Another of the pastors was very taken with the idea of judgment as the disciples were quick to judge how someone else was casting out demons in Jesus' name. Another suggestion was to talk about being on the fence. Jesus said that whoever is not against me is for me. Actually, there should be no sitting on the fence. You are either with Jesus or you are not! But the majority of the reading is about cutting off of a hand, or a foot and tearing out your eye. This Scripture to me speaks of to the fact that Jesus does not want us to have anything get in the way of our faith. He does not want anything to come between us and Him. We need to make sure that nothing can get in our way that causes us to lose faith and our relationship with Jesus. Nothing is more important than that. As our reading ends, there are some comments about salt. We are told to have salt in ourselves.

On the way home, I pondered all these ideas for this message somehow SALT jumped out at me. So, salt it is. What some of you might not know is that up until two or three years ago, I was a Watkins' lady for over 3 decades. Our main sellers were vanilla. In fact, one year I sold over \$10,000 of it in one quarter and earned a trip to Spain for a week. Watkins also sold some medical goods, like Petro Carbo Salve, Menthol Camphor, and Red Liniment. Anyone remember those? Well, we also had quite a line of salts that we sold as well. So, it should be easy to talk this one spice. Watkins sells salts in many forms and flavors. We have coarse sea salt, cheese salt, sour cream, and onion salt, and then the usual celery, onion, and garlic salt. Salt is the cheapest spice you can purchase. You can get a great big round box for less than 99 cents at Walmart even these days. Today in the store you can find, Lite Salt, Himalayan Pink Salt, Kosher salt, table talk and Celtic salt. But you still can find the salt with the little girl with the umbrella on it? So why does Jesus use this image of salt in Mark's gospel reading today? And what message is in it for us?

Salt as defined by Webster is a colorless or white crystalline solid, sodium chloride. NaCl, (for you chemistry buffs) It is extensively used as a good seasoning and a preservative.

In Jesus' day salt was often used as a trading commodity. I would think it looked much like the coarse sea salts of today. When we use it today it is usually in tiny granules that we measure by the teaspoon. And by itself one grain could not flavor much, even though that is as much as our cardiologist suggest we use. But Jesus said Salt is good, unless it loses its saltiness. Have salt in yourselves. Hummmmm.

As usual the disciples probably didn't get the image. One grain of salt will not flavor our morning eggs or our dinnertime stew. But together those infinitesimal granules have a potency all their own.

In today's Gospel, Jesus listened to a discussion about how others were healing in his name. And the disciples were arguing if anyone should be doing that. This comes right after they had the discussion of who was the greatest. Remember that from last week's lesson. Now they are worried about others stepping up to do their work of healing in Jesus' name. The 12 of those men that were called by Jesus to be disciples could not possibly do all the work in the world of spreading the good news about Jesus. And Jesus was aware of that! Others would be needed to get the word out, especially about his death and resurrection. This would be an even a greater task, a task for more than 12.

So, Jesus responds to the disciple's argument. He tells them it is OK for others to heal and preach in his name, for if people are not against him, they are for him. He was all right with others doing his ministry as long as it was done in his name. The message here is that we cannot sit on the fence and yet we have a responsibility to all work in the name of Jesus.

Still a month away, is our presidential election. Some folks, like me, can hardly wait until it is over. I am tired of the ads, the phone calls, the cards in the mail and the survey calls. Some folks think it is an election like no other where they will vote for the lesser of two evils. What a shame to have to feel that way. But when you get to that voting booth, there is no middle ground. You need to choose a candidate. You need to vote for one. At that moment there is no sitting on the fence. Those on the fence are the ones who sit home and don't vote. And then those of us who vote, won't be listening to their complaints about which ever person wins. This is my one and only suggestion, Go out and vote on November 5th. Make a choice, get off the fence.

A reason for to tell this story is to get the disciples free from their seemingly endless argument of which one of them is the greatest or which one should be first. Jesus says, "Whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward." We hear that we are all the same in God's eyes. Jesus loves us all, even little children and those who do simple acts of kindness toward one another. You see our message this morning does appear to have many interesting facets to it.

But back to Jesus who goes on to use the salt analogy. We are to have salt in ourselves; we should be interesting, be flavorful, be ourselves and get off that fence and find peace with one another and with God. Good simple advice that the world today should take note of.

Our lives have been spiced up by the love of God. We are, at our baptism seasoned with the Holy Spirit. Even thought, we may not remember the day we were baptized, we were given that salt of the spirit. We were all salted with the Holy Spirit who now lives in our hearts. So today we hear the message that sharing God's love is not a competition, but a command. It doesn't matter who among us is the greatest, but Jesus shows us that we are all important. There is plenty of salt to go around.

And salt in the saltshaker does no good unless it is used for flavor. Pour it out and flavor the world with God's love and peace. Don't be afraid if you feel inadequate to share the love of God, for anyone can give a cup of water. With God's love in your heart and when done with the love of Jesus Christ, even something so simple is a gracious act.

When I was doing part of my clinical pastoral education I worked as the chaplain at Alexian Village in Milwaukee for about 9 months. It was a care facility run by a group of brothers from the Roman Catholic Church. I was assigned a unit in the assisted living care wing. I would visit several times a week a group of about 12 people. They lived together and shared a beautiful living area, kitchen and each had their own bedroom and bath. It was a very fulfilling experience for me and one thing I noticed right away was how people are affected by my visits. Just by someone caring enough to listen they could feel God's love. Many of the residents were very spiritual people who are lonely and had a hard time seeing Jesus through their physical struggles. It has been a gift of God, having that salt in my life that I can pour out to someone else and hopefully just be being present, spice up his or her life. It was a wonderful lesson to me that sharing the love of God is sometimes just as simple as being there.

And so, I encourage you to use that salt, in all of us, placed there at our baptism, where water and word came together allowing the Holy Spirit to work within us. Today we have much work to do, as there is a whole, big, hurting world out there that needs to hear and be reminded of the love of Jesus Christ. So, jump in the Christian saltshaker and be poured out!

United in Christ, we are one body, with one mission. Next week is World Communion Sunday. People around the world will be celebrating the gift of communion together. The gift of community. Jesus said we are not to be stumbling blocks to one another, even if people worship differently. We have one faith in Jesus and participate together in the gracious gift of his body and blood. We are one body and one church in Christ.

Do any of you know this symbol? I bet you all do. Pretty easy to recognize the Green Bay Packer symbol. And another thing we all know is that Packer fans are the greatest fans in the world. Why would anyone in their right mind sit at Lambeau field on cold metal seats Sunday after Sunday in subzero temperatures to see 22 men scurry a football up and down the field? From bumper stickers to T-shirts, flags to coffee mugs we all recognize that white G surrounded by green. Packer parties, packer pools and tailgating are ways Packer fans show support for the team. Just imagine how the Pack would feel if only one or two fans came to cheer for them today in that 60,000-person venue. I know that our president Kurt and his wife Sarah are there this morning! But when we fill that stadium, we sure can make a noise. Together, we can have a lot more fun.

Well, the disciples need to hear this message. Sharing all the love Jesus has for all his people is a big task. But it is also a fun job and one worth sharing.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:13 "You are the salt of the earth." We have that salt, that Holy Spirit in us, each and every one of us. The love of God spices up our lives. How fun it is to share that love with others, to be the fans of Jesus Christ. Think of the wonderful things we can do together, like grains of salt.

So don't salt away this amazing gift of God. Share God's love and the good news of Jesus Christ will anyone who will listen. And by the way, I certainly hope you won't take this message with a grain of salt.

AMEN and Peace Be With You!