

Epiphany V
St. Matthew 5:13-20
February 9th, 2020
St. George's Episcopal Church
Fr. Chris

Saline Solution

Today we remember that we are old salts who should be salty. What is that you ask? Our saltiness is our joy and faithfulness. To be salty is to be humble and happy. To lose your saltiness, as Jesus suggests, you are no better than the stuff they throw down on roads to make them melt ice or to keep dirt roads from being too dusty. If you lose your saltiness, that is, earn a case of the blahs, you lose that taste of wonder, hope, positiveness, humility and happiness, without which, what good are we? There is nothing better than to be old salts in the faith...

Salt was once as good as money in trade in the ancient world. As common as it is, salt is still valuable today. Consider the cost of the fancy salts in the grocery store. There is Kosher salt and Fleur De Sol, (a smoked variety) Hawaiian, and Himalayan and sea salts to mention a few. These will leave your wallet lighter but will bring subtle savoriness to your cooking, I suppose. But salt is also inexpensive to buy. Salt is common-as common as table salt. Salt makes food savory and palatable. Salt can make the bland and inedible edible and enjoyable to your taste. Our prepared foods both in the grocery store and in restaurants are full of it. The recommended human consumption for salt is 2400 mg a day. I was surprised when I started to have to notice how much salt is in the foods that I used to eat and enjoy. For example, I always thought that a grinder was a very healthy choice until I read that a half grinder packed with deli sliced turkey had over 1700 mg of salt. And I was amazed to discover that Campbell's Cream of Broccoli and Butternut Squash canned condensed soups, which I was tempted to purchase because they are two of my favorites, both have over 3000 mg of salt in a serving. Wow. Salt, salt everywhere and too much salt to eat!

Salt helps us retain water when the weather is hot, and when there is a stretch of really hot weather, salt pills have been known to be recommended to stay healthy. Speaking of health, nothing heals a sore throat better than a mixture of salt water. Alas, too much of a good thing can get the heart pumping overtime and raise your blood pressure. Salt has also been used to this day as an antiseptic for wound care.

Salt has many other uses. It can be a preservative. Who hasn't heard of "salt-cod"? In fact, most prepared foods have a healthy or as I just pointed out, unhealthy dose of sodium to preserve them as they wait to be consumed. So salt makes food taste better and at the same time, makes it last. Nice combination. Salt also melts ice, and so we spread it under foot to melt the ice on walkways and roadways in the winter months. In the dry, hot summer months, salt is also used on unpaved roadways to hold down the

dust kicked up when you drive over them. It helps attract water to the soil which helps it pack down better as vehicles drive over it.

About 2/3 of our Island Home, the Earth, is made up of salt water. People who made their livings on the oceans became known as old salts. Old Salts... Salt has always been plentiful and common and necessary to life. What a compliment to be called an old salt!

What does it mean this admonition about losing your saltiness? I wasn't sure that salt could lose its salty taste. If it does, it would be simply grainy and blah. Can salt lose its saltiness, I wondered? Why did Jesus use this example?

Well salt is one of the most stable things. [NaCl-sodium chloride] It cannot lose its saltiness unless exposed to water and diluted. After it dries out, a white powder is left behind, which still has the chemical structure of salt, but loses its taste of saltiness. Dilute it, and lose it.

When you take the saltiness of being a Christian and dilute it, its taste is gone and much of its power is lost. Now I begin to see the meaning: how often do we dilute the core of who we are, and become a tasteless, almost useless substance, to be cast under the feet of others and trampled. Salt makes us stand up and stand out.

Think of some of those qualities we mentioned earlier. Salty Christians should be as common and numerous as the salt in our lives and on our tables. We should bring taste to that faith by creative ways of living it out and loving other people. If food is salted just right, we find it delicious and tasty. We savor it. We want to come back for more. Imagine people returning to church and wanting to come back for more! I am reminded here of the words of the hymn sung before communion some times:

"Taste and see, taste and see
the goodness of the Lord.
Oh, taste and see, taste and see
the goodness of the Lord, of the Lord."

So the experience of the Christian faith ought to be savory. People should want to come back for more. How would you do that?

Then there is the quality of preservation that salt brings with it. We are, as it were, a preservation society like the one in Newport that preserves the great mansions of the late 19th and early 20th centuries so that we can see what that lifestyle was like. The more I visit those mansions, the more I wonder how much has really changed in our society at all. There is still the very rich and then the rest of us that are poor with a smattering of other folks in the middle. We are also called to preserve the Christian faith and to hand it on to the next generation with its truth and core unchanged. While some things may change, the essential message, the truth and love of it must not, lest it lose its saltiness and become unusable to the people of the next generation. Will anyone want to tour God's house like they do those mansions in Newport in the future? Would you buy a ticket to do that?

Then there is the quality of salt which melts ice. There are two things to take away here. The first is that salt can help us with the slippery portions of life, where we might slide, slip and fall and seriously injure ourselves. It is so easy to slip away from the faith. It is so easy not to be watching and land on your back when you take a slippery fall. Our lives need to be sprinkled with a heavy dose of the salt of life to prevent this. Daily prayer, recollection and putting that salt to use are necessary here.

The second quality of salt that melts ice is an internal one that acts upon our hearts. I call it the cardiology of faithfulness. Salting our internal life brings with it the possibility of melting away hearts of ice and stone, so that they can become alive and pump out love and warmth instead of judgment, rejection and coolness on contact with others. I think you can get what I mean. Salty Christians are heart healthy and the dosing of salt in their lives keeps their hearts from hardening.

Salt also has the quality of being able to heal. To be a salty Christian is to be a healer. Salt reminds us of this ministry. The healing can be as common and simple as salt. Using our salt to be healers can bring people together and back to the faith. Using our salt can purge those things that infect our faith. Using our salt to clear our throats can enable and strengthen us to speak truth to others and to power.

Salt, because it is a common human experience, has been a part of our faith also. There are many references to it in the Bible, beyond today's Gospel. One of the most famous was the story of Lot's wife who turned into a pillar of salt after she looked back at Sodom and Gomorrah. Salt has been used to make Water Holy from the earliest of times to banish impurities from the water before it is blessed. Holy Water taken from the Baptismal Font is used by Christians to remind them of their Baptismal vows upon entering the church. For those churches that use Holy Water stoops with the salt purified and diluted water at the entrance to their sanctuaries, their Altar Guilds must be mindful of cleaning them regularly to remove the white residue of the tasteless salt left behind on the edges of the stoop if the water is allowed to dry out. Another image for me of being careful not to dilute our faith

As Christians, our salt should not lose its saltiness, or it loses its value in the community and to others. Keep your saltiness, for this metaphor represents the good you can do and be by being a salty Christian. Savor your faith and invite others to do so. Be the spice of new life to those around you. Be an Old Salt! AMEN