

“Let’s use the Good Salt”

- It was a year or two ago now, Katy and I hosted a dinner for a friend from Arkansas
 - And this person was very kind, and brought a little gift for us
 - As I opened up the gift bag, I pulled out... a little bag of salt.
 - Salt. Like table salt.
 - I admit I was appreciative of the kind gesture, but wondered why in the world someone would gift me a little bag of salt
 - I suspect like many of you, we buy the big, cylinder shaped container of cheap, generic salt at the grocery store to use in recipes
 - Once, and only once, did I buy fancy salt for salted caramels, the flaky kind
 - Now It was clear that this salt was not cheap nor generic
 - We learned it came from the restaurant and store Eatily in Chicago
 - And this salt proudly proclaimed in Italian that it was the “Pope’s Salt”
 - Salt good enough for the Pope... well that was intriguing
 - Still I wondered, how can salt be anything other than salt?
 - It’s just sodium chloride, NaCl, essential to our survival actually
 - A little iodine added in it for good thyroid health
 - But you probably should not use too much of it for the sake of you heart health
 - Salt, we all know it, it is ubiquitous to us, a backdrop of the high salt, high fat, high sugar diet that we all are used to in our culture
 - This Pope’s salt, and maybe you already know about it!- I did a little reading: ¹
 - It comes from a little town called Cervia
 - It is one of the purest salts on earth and comes with a unique, sweet taste on the tongue
 - In the 80’s, traditional harvesting methods were restored
 - And it has been hand-delivered to the pope on and off for over 500 years

¹ <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/cervia-salt>

- So what is so special about fancy salt that the pope has approved?
- Well! Let me tell you. I am a convert!
- The first time I used it, I way-over-salted a dish I was preparing, but I did not use more salt than normal
 - It was more intense, more concentrated if possible
- So next time I went more sparingly, and lo and behold, it really tasted good.
- Really, like oddly good with overtones that I had never had before
- I could tell the difference, and not just me, the whole family
- We have now given it a monicker- the good salt, or the fancy salt
- And we pull it out and delicately dust any appropriate veggies with it when we have cooked a good meal
- I do that little arm thing, like the TV chefs, and sprinkle away!
- We are only about half of the way through this little bag of salt, because it takes so little
- This whole experience has got me thinking about salt a little, and our readings today brought it all up again
 - Jesus tells the crowds gathered for his “Sermon on the Mount” in the gospel of Matthew, that they are the salt of the earth
 - This is part two so to speak, following the Beatitudes
 - As the gospel writer Matthew writes, he is writing to Jewish converts to the faith, and he speaks to issues faced by the ancient Jewish people
 - In Mathew, Jesus is concerned with the heart of the law², with what it means to be God’s people
 - It is not an easy answer for the Israelites at this time
 - They fervently believed God liberated them from Egypt to be God’s people
 - To be a light to enlighten the nations, to bless everyone around them
 - Yet they are once again governed and oppressed by a foreign nation
 - The question is an existential one for them: How do we live faithfully and remain obedient to God in a changed world?³
 - Jesus tells this crowd, not just the disciples, mind you, but the crowd of people gathered- you, you are the salt of the earth

² <http://leftbehindandlovingit.blogspot.com/2014/02/the-heart-of-law-and-light-of-world.html>

³ Barbara Brown Taylor, *Exceeding Righteousness*, quoted by Kathryn Matthews Huey, <http://www.ucc.org/worship/samuel/february-9-2014.html>

- You and I have been so over-exposed to salt, and so distanced from its ancient uses, that most of this probably goes in one ear and out the other
- We also have been repeatedly exposed to this passage of scripture too, so the impact is dulled
- The ancients knew it much more intimately than you and I do because it was a scarce resource
- Salt was treasured in the ancient world.
- It may have even been used as a form of currency in some parts⁴
- Countless wars were fought over it⁵
- One author said that, even “The history of the Americas is one of constant warfare over salt.”⁶
- It was essential to the ancient way of life, as it is to ours
- Salt is essential to life itself- Sodium is needed to “transmit nerve impulses, contract and relax muscle fibers (including those in the heart and blood vessels), and maintain a proper fluid balance.”⁷
- Although you and I are more likely to be in danger of having too much than not enough
- WebMD lists a bunch of other uses for us medically: from teeth stains to constipation, bug bites and canker sores⁸
- And did you know? 50% of drugs in the US are a salt form⁹
- Even though salt in the wound may sting a little, it’s usually good for you.
- We also know that salt’s ability to preserve food was a key contributor in the development of human civilization itself
- While we enjoy refrigeration today, salt was key in keeping food from spoiling and keeping people from starving.
- And of course, it has always been used as a flavor enhancing spice
- Jesus says, you are the salt of the world. It depends upon you
- You are valuable, desired, loved- important.

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_salt

⁵ <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/cervia-salt>

⁶ Mark Kulansky, Retrieved online on 1-27-2023 from <https://www.health.harvard.edu/heart-health/take-it-with-a-grain-of-salt>

⁷ <https://www.health.harvard.edu/heart-health/take-it-with-a-grain-of-salt>

⁸ <https://www.webmd.com/a-to-z-guides/ss/slideshow-salt-uses>

⁹ <https://walrus.com/questions/what-are-salt-forms-of-drugs-and-why-are-they-different>

- And he was speaking this to a group of people who were considered exactly the opposite in the Roman Empire
- And Jesus asks the question, but what good is salt if it loses its saltiness, or if it does not do all of the things we need it to do?
- Here's a little trivia for you: salt technically cannot lose its saltiness
 - Sodium Chloride cannot stop being what it is, and there's been a lot of ink spilled over this saying from Jesus
 - However, Salt can become ritually unclean and then thrown out¹⁰
 - And salt deposits around the dead sea, after heavy rain, still look like salt but are not. ¹¹
 - The salt having been leached from the other minerals
 - So they knew what he was saying
- And so can we
- Because Jesus is telling us, people of faith, inheritors of this Gospel Good News, that we too are the salt of the earth
- And its light too, he says- just as important.
- Salt and light are the source of life.
- We are to be like that.
- In a world that is increasingly secular, just like the world at the time Matthew was written was certainly not Jewish,
- That might be a hard thing for us to embrace and believe, even those of us here
- But what would the world be without salt and light?
- Dead. Unexciting. Without flavor.
- Today is of course our annual meeting Sunday
 - And I've been thinking about Jesus' admonishing and description of us- that we are salt and light
 - And that we are to be salt and light to the world
 - And today, especially salt.
 - A Salty Church!
 - To preserve, to enrich, and to facilitate life, and to do it with a little pizzazz
 - A church can be a salty church when it preserves, protects and helps people when they are at their lowest
 - St. Michael's certainly does that, not only with 10% of its budget last year and will do again 2023

¹⁰ <http://montreal.anglican.org/comments/apr05m.shtml>

¹¹ <http://montreal.anglican.org/comments/apr05m.shtml>

- Over \$60,000 in grants to organizations, many nearby, who directly feed, house, and care for people in need
- But we also do it by being there for one another
- While we typically reserve the words “Pastoral Care” for what the priest and team do when there is a critical need like a death, or a hospitalization
 - Or a ongoing health and wellness concern
- The care we have for each other, from pew to pew, makes up the bulk of it
- And is just as important in preserving and enriching our common lives.
- And in another take on the word Preservation, I am going to talk a little more about the Preservation fund later, and my hopes for it
- Not only are we preserving those outside, preserving those inside
- But we are preserving this very church for its future work, for the next 75 years- to keep being salty
- And then there’s enriching- I hope we as Christians enrich the world in which we live
 - Although we all are deeply aware of past and present ways in some Christians do not do this
- We can be a different flavor of salt in this world, the Good Salt, with the distinctive sweet flavors
- That bring out God’s work and movement in each other, and in those we meet who may not even know we are people of faith
- But they experience something different about us, there’s know we are different by how we treat them
- We can facilitate and enhance life- that is the core of the Gospel,
 - to unlock a Kingdom of God that is peace and wholeness for us here on earth
 - And peace and wholeness when we leave this earth.
- That Almighty God, the creator of all of the universe, desires us to live fully and wholly now and later, and that love is the key to unlock it.
- Michael Curry’s favorite saying before he started saying, “Beloved community”...
 - “If it’s not about love, it’s not about God.”
- I know hearing about how we are salt is probably cliché after 2000 years since Jesus taught about it
 - But perhaps even to our salt-filled ears we can better appreciate the good salt
- The real salt, the salt that can change our hearts, our minds, and our world

- My hope for this parish, after its first 75 years, is that over the next 75 years, when a new person walks through these doors,
- They get at taste of some fancy salt, and they feel its affects
- They feel love, both from us and from God through us
- That we feel it for each other, and we begin to flavor the lives of others
- And that love, the much needed salt, can then be carried out of here to a world that seems to be in more need of it now than ever before
- I don't always know what the future holds, but I know what we are to do and be in the future.
- Go be the fancy salt.

Amen.