

**October 7, 2012
Pentecost 19**

"Salted in Christ"

MARK 9:38-50

Teacher, said John, "we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us." ³⁹ "Do not stop him," Jesus said. "No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, ⁴⁰ for whoever is not against us is for us. ⁴¹ I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward. ⁴² "And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck. ⁴³ If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. ⁴⁴ ⁴⁵ And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. ⁴⁶ ⁴⁷ And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸ where "their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched." ⁴⁹ Everyone will be salted with fire. ⁵⁰ "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other."

You cannot do much cooking or baking without salt. We salt our food to make it taste better and bring out the flavor. At the time of Jesus salt was used to preserve food, especially meat, to keep it from spoiling. I remember how my dad would soak hams in salt brine for weeks and then smoke them in the smokehouse. The hams could be stored for months in the cool basement without refrigeration.

Salt was expensive. Roman soldiers were paid with salt. The word salary comes from the Latin word for salt. We even have a saying "He is not worth his salt" to describe someone who is not worth their salary.

God's Old Testament people added salt to their sacrifices and offerings to the Lord. By salting some of the sacrifices to the Lord the people were saying, "We are giving our best to the Lord."

Our lives have been spoiled by sin. You don't have to look very hard into your life this past week to see evidence of the rot and decay of sin. It is everywhere. Jesus calls on us to be salted, not by anything we produce in our lives, but by the life he has lived for us and the death he has died for us. That is the only way to escape the rot and decay of sin.

The need to be salted

Jesus' disciples sure needed the salt that only Jesus could provide. We smell something very rotten in the lives of the disciples. John comes to Jesus and says, "Teacher, saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of

us." The disciples have been arguing among themselves on who was the greatest. Jesus had to tell them, "If anyone wants to be first he must be the very last, and the servant of all." How do rotten people try to make themselves smell better? They point to others who are worse than they are or they try to cover up what they have done wrong by pointing to something good they have done.

John thought he was doing something great for Jesus by telling a man who was casting out demons in Jesus' name to stop it. They told this man to stop it because "he was not one of us." John wanted a gold star from Jesus for telling a man who was performing a miracle in Jesus name to stop it because "he was not one of us."

Something similar happened in the lives of Joshua and Moses in Numbers chapter 11. There were two men at the time of Moses who were elders or leaders of the people named Eldad and Medad. It says that the Spirit of the Lord rested on these men and they started prophesying for the Lord just as Moses had done. Joshua came to Moses and said, "Moses, my lord, stop them!" Joshua wanted Moses to have the exclusive position of prophet. He could not tolerate the Lord working out of the box to have these two fellows Eldad and Medad prophesying for the Lord. In these last days in which we live, we need to be prepared for the Lord to work out of the box and even use unlikely people to bring the name of Jesus to other people so they can be saved.

Jesus had to set his disciples straight. Once again the ugly sin of thinking they were better than others was showing itself. "Do not stop him," Jesus said. "No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us. I tell you the truth anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward."

It is not always the big shots in the church who do miracles in the name of Jesus. On judgment day the least likely people will be asking Jesus, "When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?" What was Jesus' answer? "I tell you the truth whatever you do for one of the least of these brothers of mine you did it for me." The little things we do for Jesus do not go unnoticed. They will be seen on judgment day. Are you ready to see our risen Lord and Savior build his church in the least likely places and with the least likely people?

About a year ago I was privileged to see first-hand the miracle of God's grace in the life the lady who once lived next door to the church. I was good friends with Mrs. Mendosa. She was a good neighbor for our church, even though the peacocks liked to compete with us when we sang our hymns. When I heard she had terminal cancer, I visited her in the hospital. Her first words after I said hello were, "I am thinking about Jesus and his blood that was shed for me at the cross for all my sins." She did not attend our church. She was a devote Roman Catholic. How foolish we would be to think that the Holy Spirit would only be found in people who are part of our church and our belief.

Jesus has strong words for the disciples who are so caught up with doing things only their way that they cause other people to fall by their bad attitudes and bad behavior. "And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for

him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck." The Greek word for sin is better translated "fall." It is the word skandalizo from which we get our English word "scandal." If my condescending attitude or better than thou attitude causes someone who is weak in the faith to fall away from the Lord, then it would be better if a millstone were tied around my neck and I was thrown into the sea. Millstones are very heavy. You will drown quickly with one tied around your neck. Jesus has zero tolerance for those who would cause someone to lose their trust in him because of false teaching or an attitude that turns people away and causes them to doubt their salvation. The Holy Christian Church has no place for people who turn other people against Jesus.

Jesus does not want these disciples hurting other people. He also warns them against hurting themselves by tolerating faith destroying sin in their lives. "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched." Jesus does not want you to tolerate sin and eventually lose your faith in him. He recommends radical surgery. Obviously hand chopping and foot cutting and eye gouging aren't going to get rid of sin that exists in the heart. Jesus wants even more radical surgery. He wants us to come with our sin to him to have it removed and forgiven. That can only take place at the cross.

Jesus does not hesitate to warn his disciples about the dangers of hell. He describes hell as the place where the fire does not go out. He describes it as the place where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched. The word used here for hell is "gehenna." It was also the name for the garbage dump where fires burned and worms ate decaying flesh. Eternal punishment will be a place for fire where people do not die. It is a place of eternal punishment. Jesus wants no one to spend eternity there. 2 Peter 3 says, "The Lord is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

How will we be saved? How will we be preserved? How will we not rot forever? The answer is salt, the perfect salt of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Perfect salt in Jesus

"Everyone will be salted with fire." The world in which we live will someday be purified with fire. "The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare." Salt can preserve and so can fire. Just as the original world was destroyed by water, the present world will be destroyed by fire. The result of that destruction will be a new heaven and a new earth that will never perish. Every day of life on this earth we think about that day coming when everything and everyone will be salted by fire.

Jesus says "salt is good." He is the good salt. As he talks to his disciples, he is getting ready to go to the cross for the sins of the world. He is the only way to escape the fires of hell and be preserved in this life and for all eternity. Take Jesus out of my life I have

nothing. Then the salt loses its saltiness. I want the faith of Mrs. Mendosa who said "All I am thinking about is the blood of Jesus paying for all my sins." I want the faith of Martin Luther who says in his catechism, "Christ has redeemed me a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and the from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with his holy, precious innocent sufferings and death. All this he did that I should be his own and live under him in his kingdom...." The wounds of Jesus, the dying of Jesus, the living of Jesus, the rising of Jesus is what saves and preserves us in this life for all eternity. As we sang this past summer in or Bible camp: "Living, loving, dying, rising, Jesus did it all for me."

This wonderful Savior makes you salty. He says "Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with each other." Stop arguing about who is the greatest. Stop looking down on other believes who are not "one of us." Be peace makers. Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world." The salt in this salt shaker does no good unless it is shaken out on my food to season it. You are sprinkled out up and down the Central Coast as salty Christians to season the lives of people with the living, loving, dying, rising of Jesus your Savior. Salt is good. Jesus is good. You are so blessed to be salted in Jesus. Amen.