

Pentecost 19
October 4, 2015

"You Are 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."

As a child I watched in fascination as my father put large hams and large slabs of bacon into stone crocks filled with salty brine. There they sat for a couple of weeks absorbing the salt. Then they were smoked in a smokehouse with apple wood for several more weeks. The salt and the smoke preserved the ham and bacon. They could safely hang from the ceiling in the cool basement without even needing refrigeration.

At the time of Jesus salt was very important for preserving meat such as the fish that were caught in the Sea of Galilee, then salted and dried. The two fish used to feed 5,000 people were probably such dried and salted fish.

In the words we just read Jesus says that salt is good. He is referring to the way we are preserved and saved. We are saved by faith in Jesus and his all atoning sacrifice for our sin at the cross, not by the kind of life we try to live. Such child like faith and trust preserves us. It gives us eternal life that goes on forever and ever. We want nothing, absolutely nothing, to take us from being salted in Christ. It is an honor and privilege to tell you this morning that **"You Are Salted in Christ."**

Because you are salted, you fight against pride

Because you are salted in Christ and preserved for eternal life, you want nothing to do with self-centered pride when it pops up in your life. Notice how pride shows itself again in the lives of the disciples. John comes to Jesus and says, "Teacher, we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us." John expected Jesus to say, "Way to go boys! Way to put that person in his place for throwing

out demons in my name and not being one of the my Twelve disciples.” Instead Jesus bursts their sinful bubble of pride by saying, “Do not stop him. 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.”

We have sinful pride. Our sinful pride leads us to think that it is all about us. But it is not. It is all about Jesus. Last week we saw the disciples arguing about who was greatest in the kingdom of God. Jesus sat a child in their midst and said, “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me.” Little children are so trusting. Our neighbors have a little baby boy named Jeffrey. Occasionally we hear him cry. He is dependent on his parents to feed him, keep him warm, change his diapers, love him and cuddle him. Like a little child we are dependent on Jesus to be the salt that preserves us and saves.

It is not all about us. We aren’t the only ones who can tell other people what Jesus has done to preserve them and save them. The disciples were so amazed at how they were able to do miracles in Jesus’ name, and preach the gospel and even cast out evil spirits. What they did not realize was how their awesome God who sent his Son to spare them from eternal punishment could also use other people to rescue people by performing miracles, preaching the gospel and casting out evil spirits.

So we are humbled today. We want to follow Jesus and tell the whole world how Jesus did absolutely everything necessary to save us. We are so careful to teach God’s Word correctly. We even teach that Baptism washes away sin and that we actually receive the Body and Blood of Christ with the bread and wine in Holy Communion. We like to have all our ducks in order when it comes to correct teaching and that is good. It is a huge blessing. But then our awesome God who wants all to be saved uses other people beside us to bring the gospel to people. Look at the people all over the world who do things in the name of Jesus even when their teaching does not line up as close to God’s Word as it should. Jesus said, “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.” So we are humbled to think that not everything goes through us. Our risen Lord and Savior will use all sorts of people to salt people and preserve them for his kingdom.

Because you are salted you care about the little ones

Because you are salted in Christ you don’t want to do anything to cause others to lose this salt, especially the little ones. “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 millstone tied around his neck.” It isn’t just the big people who are important to Jesus. The little ones are also important to him. The Greek word for “cause to sin” is the word skandalizo from which we get our English word scandal. It can also be translated “cause to fall.”

Remember the mean kid in school who stuck his foot out and tripped someone and caused them to fell flat on their face. God forbid that we say something or do something that causes a child or someone weak in their faith to fall in faith or doubt that Jesus is the salt that saves them. Jesus wants them to have him as their salt. The person who does such terrible things should have a millstone hung around their neck and tossed into the sea. Have you ever seen a millstone grinding wheat into flour? Millstones are huge and they

are heavy.

There is a control freak in all of us that likes to put people in their place when they are struggling and not measuring up in their faith. What does God's Word tell us in Ephesians 4 about building others up in the Body of Christ and not tearing them down? "Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head." We will speak the truth in love and do everything necessary to help people stay salted in Christ especially the little ones. In medicine the first rule of the Hippocratic oath is this: "First, do no harm." People who are salted in Christ are very beautiful people, even those who are weak or small in their faith. They need our special attention and love. They don't need people who push them under when they are barely treading water.

Because you are salted you care about falling in your faith

Dear Christian, because you are salted in Christ, you need to look at your own life and get rid of anything that might cause you to fall from that precious faith. "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 recommends radical surgery for the problem of sin. He of course is not asking us to literally cut off the hand or the foot or the eye that causes us to fall. He wants us to cut off those things we might do with our hands or feet or eyes that lead us away from the preserving salt or faith in him.

So we ask ourselves this morning, "How important it is us to address the problem of sin when it pops up in our life?" For some things in life such as our routine problems and troubles we can say, "In the light of eternity does it really matter." But when sin pops up we say the very opposite. "In the light of eternity this sin does matter because if left unchecked it could destroy that saving salt I have in Christ." Most of our schools in this community have a zero tolerance policy when it comes to engaging in a physical violence. We have a zero tolerance policy to any sin that pops up in our lives because left unchecked it could lead us away from Jesus.

Notice that Jesus speaks about hell as a real place. The word used here for hell is "Ghenna." The Valley of Ben Hinnom, or also called Gehenna, was the garbage dump outside of Jerusalem that was constantly burning and filled with nasty worms or maggots that fed on the garbage. The constantly burning fires and the worms are powerful reminders to us that hell is a place of eternal suffering where the worm does not die. Jesus does not want us to lose him as our salt. He is the only one who can save and preserve us from this terrible place. Someday this whole world will be salted with fire. It will be destroyed. The only thing that will remain are those who are preserved and salted forever in Jesus.

Because you are salted you have Christ and his cross

What was on the mind of Jesus when he spoke these words about salt being good and salt losing its saltiness? What was on his mind when he said, "Have salt in yourselves and

be at peace with each other." Jesus is thinking of going to cross. Again and again he has been telling his disciples what will be happened at the cross. He yearns and longs for all people everywhere to come to him and be salted and preserved forever in heaven. Look into yourself and you will find nothing that can preserve your life and spare you from the judgment to come. Look at Jesus and you have everything needed to be safe and secure in this life and for all eternity.

I was fascinated at how my father preserved ham and bacon with salt and smoking. I am far more impressed at how my heavenly Father and your heavenly Father has given us his Son to preserve us as his dear children in this life and for all eternity. And our God who so overwhelms in the way he has chosen to save us also overwhelms when he calls us to be the salt of the earth as we bring others the Savior who can save and preserve them forever. Amen.