



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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October 11, 2009

19th Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 9:38-50

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Numbers 11:16, 24-29

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 51b

Second Lesson: Philippians 1:12-18a

Gospel: Mark 9:38-50

Have “Salt” In Yourself

There are threats to your “salt”

The result of losing your “salt”

“Have salt in yourself” is what Jesus just said to us, right? Well, I guess he is going to have to talk with my doctor because every time I go see him, he tells me to cut back on salt because of blood pressure. So who do I follow now, Jesus or my doctor? Well, they’re not talking about the same thing, are they? Jesus isn’t saying, “Make sure you have a high salt diet.” That’s not what he’s talking about. That’s not the kind of salt he is talking about.

So the question that has to be coming is what kind of salt is he talking about? That’s a little tougher question, isn’t it? I think when we remember the purpose of salt in Jesus’ day it helps us to come to an answer. In our day we use salt primarily as a flavoring, right? Growing up as a kid, I watched my dad dump tons of salt and tons of pepper on everything that we ate. He said in the Navy, that’s what you had to do all the time because the food had no taste at all. So he had to dump all that stuff on it and it became a habit and he continually did it.

In Scripture though, salt is not talked about as a flavoring. It’s not telling us to be flavorful. Salt was used more as a preservative, right? It was used to cure meats, preserve meats. They couldn’t just go and throw it in the freezer. They couldn’t preserve it the way we preserve it, so salt was a preservative. So it meant to have something in you that will preserve you.

Then take a look at the rest of what he is talking about here. He was talking a lot about hell in what I just read to you, wasn’t he? He was talking about the salt that preserves you from going to hell. He says everyone will be salted with fire. The salt that comes with fire that preserves us, I believe, is the Law message and the Gospel message. God speaks in his Word of his Law as a refining fire that shows us what needs to be refined, what needs to be purified. He tells us the Gospel is a refining fire that burns away all the things that separate us from God because when we believe that Jesus lived and died in our place, he was perfect where we have sinned and he took the punishment where we have sinned, we are made holy before God.

So the kingdom message that we’ve been talking about on Monday mornings at Bible class, the Kingdom of God, the kingdom message is this refining fire. And it is what

brings salt into us. So have salt in yourself really means, stay close to God's message that saves you. Keep it as a part of your life. And this morning's reading from Mark 9 really tells us why that's so important to have salt in yourself. There are many threats to this salt that is in us. And Jesus also paints a picture for us this morning of the threat that comes if it takes away our saltiness and we lose our saltiness and we're not made salty again. He shows us some of the awful results that come from losing this salt. So have salt in yourself.

The text starts out with a question from John. These words follow immediately upon what we talked about last week in the Gospel. Remember how the Gospel ended last week with Jesus saying to the disciples, "Whoever receives you, receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me." And receiving Jesus as receiving the One who sent Jesus must have struck a note with John because it took him back to where they had told some guy who was driving out demons in Jesus' name to knock it off because they weren't one of the people that Jesus had sent out to do that. When he had sent them out, he had given them authority to cast out demons is what we are told in the Gospel.

So it seems like John and the others were a little jealous that this guy was doing this and he wasn't one of them. "He shouldn't be doing that because he's not one of us." It kind of seems like there's a bit of jealousy and envy like our Philippians reading and what we see in Joshua in the reading from Numbers this morning. But now he is starting to wonder, "Did we do what is right?" His conscience is kind of accusing him of having been jealous when he shouldn't have been jealous, having envy when he shouldn't have been envious, and being a little arrogant and proud when he shouldn't have been arrogant and proud. So he says, "This is what happened, Jesus. Did we do the right thing?"

Jesus said, "No. No you didn't. You can't at the same time do a miracle in my name and in the next moment say anything bad against me. Even if he is not one of you guys, my Spirit is living in him and he is doing this work. He is doing it in my name. And he is doing it to serve others, and if anyone serves you in my name because you are a Christian or serves you in my name because they are a Christian, they are living and exercising their faith." We would do well to be kind of like Moses to say, "I wish God would enable more and more people to serve." That would make a lot of sense. But here is one of the threats to our salt that lives in us, right?

That's not how we always react, is it? We don't always react with, "Boy, that's great! Those guys served the Lord. Look at how they did it. Okay, it might not have been the same way I did it, but they were serving God and they were doing it because they loved God." Do you have that conversation often with fellow members of the congregation? Or do conversations more often go like this – "what were those people thinking when they made that decision? I would have never made that decision. That was stupid. That was foolish. What is wrong with those people;" as they are seeking to serve God as Christians within a congregation or within their own life.

You and I have a tendency to react more negatively. "That's not the way I would do it. And if it's not the way I would do it, it must be wrong." Does that sound kind of fair? Is that how we are? Does a rug lie on a floor? Of course that's the way we are. We get envious. We get jealous. We get a little bit prideful and arrogant and think that our way is the only way or the way we have always done it is the only way. If anything is changed and done differently, that must mean that we are saying the way it was done before is wrong. No, it's just saying we are going to try something different. Different doesn't mean wrong. Different means different. Different doesn't mean the way things were done before was wrong. It just means we are trying something different.

If we try things that don't work out, so be it. At least we're trying. But if we are just going to sit back and react to what other Christians try and say, "That was stupid. I knew that would never work." Then why weren't you at the meeting and talk about it ahead of time instead of telling me about it afterwards? If God had given you this great insight into the future, why aren't you picking the right Powerball numbers for Pete's sake!

We are great in hindsight. And that hindsight often is when it fits my pride and my arrogance, or when it fits your pride and your arrogance. That's a threat. That's a threat to our saltiness because pride and arrogance, as we talked about this morning in Bible class, comes not from God. It is the sin of Satan. It is the sin of the evil angels that fell away from God. And when we start feeling that pride and that arrogance, it is not coming from God. It is coming from Satan. It's coming from Satan because he wants to have a threat to the faith that lives in us, or the salt that is in us.

We need to recognize it. Jesus lays out before us how serious this is. He says, "If you are going to lead one of these little ones that believe in me to sin, it would be better off for you if you had a large millstone tied around your neck and were thrown into a deep lake." If that large millstone would have a string on it, I don't care how long you would pull it as you are sinking to the bottom, it's not going to inflate and cause you to rise to the surface. You are going to drown. That's what Jesus is saying. "You'd be better off dead than cause one of these little ones who believe in me to sin."

This is serious. Don't mess with your own salt. Don't mess with someone else's salt. Don't lead someone else into sin because you are a fool at times. We do that though, don't we? When we get together in groups, have you ever thought about how as a group we can make really poor decisions and egg each other on in ways that, as an individual we would say, "No, that's wrong. That isn't something we should do."

I remember in high school when we would be walking around the mall together. The older people would look at us and be scared. I suppose they had every right to be scared, because you get a pack of teenagers together and we egg each other on, we can do really stupid stuff. That's kind of how it is though when you get a group of people together and they start pushing people to do things that on their own they wouldn't do. So, don't lead someone else into sin.

That's a challenge for us from the time that we are some of the older kids in a grade school where we can lead the younger kids into sin by being a bad example. It continues on all the rest of our life when we can set a bad example and lead others into sin, because we are constantly teaching. We just sometimes do it when we open our mouths. But the example we set, is it leading someone else into sin? Be on guard against that. That's a threat to their salt and to yours.

What he says instead is to serve others in Christ's name. Serve out of love for Jesus and what he has done. Serve him in ways that bring him glory and put the interest of other people ahead of your own. That's to his glory. That's how you have salt in yourself. You exercise that faith. You strengthen that faith. And you live that faith. That's what Jesus is talking about here.

Then he gets into reminding us why these threats are so serious. He even goes so far as to say you'd be better off to cut off your hand, your foot, pluck out your eye, rather than let it cause you to sin because it can lead to hell. The result of losing your salt is not a pretty picture. That's why he paints that picture. You'd be better off cutting these things off.

Is he really telling us that we should cut our hands off and our feet off? I don't think so. Not too long ago, as we were reading through the Gospels this summer in Series B, didn't Jesus say to us, "It's not what goes into a man that makes him sinful. It's what comes out of his heart." If our heart is evil, we do evil things. It isn't my hand that causes me to sin. It's the sinful nature, my heart that's within me. The hand is just the tool that is used at times to serve my sinful nature, or the eye or the foot. What causes me to sin is what I am. I have a sinful nature. I am not basically good. I am basically evil. And you're the same.

So because of what we are, we do things that are sinful at times and then we try to justify it. We try to rationalize it. We try to excuse it. But it's sin. Flat out. It's just sin. Recognize it for what it is. And he is saying you need to recognize it because you'd be better off crippled and maimed by cutting off these limbs than to have them and lose your faith. That's what he is saying.

Then he paints some pictures of hell that we probably don't like to think about all that much. We don't like to think about hell. We like to think more about heaven, and that's probably a good thing. But he warns us about what hell is like, and he uses pictures that I don't know I can completely comprehend. I don't know that you can either. I know I can't comprehend the perfection of heaven. It's beyond what I, as a sinner, can understand in this world. I think hell is probably the same way. It's beyond what I can begin to picture in this world.

He uses pictures of fire. He uses the picture of that worm that does not die. It's a picture of worms, maggots in our body and they are continually eating away at our body. They never completely devour us and they are continually eating. I don't like that

picture. I don't think that sounds like a great way to spend eternity. I think it kind of makes you a little squeamish, doesn't it?

Then he is talking about the fire that is not quenched. You know how it is when you touch something that's hot? What does your hand automatically do? You automatically pull away, right? You don't stop and think, "Should I keep my hand here, or should I pull it away?" You just automatically yank that hand away when you touch a hot pan or touch the stove, right?

Can you imagine spending all eternity with that thought? "I have to pull my hand out of this fire," and it's your whole body that's in the fire and you can't pull it away and it doesn't go out. I can't begin to comprehend that, and in fact, I don't really want to. But God is painting this picture because he wants us to see just how serious he is about sin. When Satan and the evil angels rebelled against God, that's when hell was created as this gloomy place, this gloomy dungeon for them to spend eternity in. In literature and things at times it pictures hell as something Satan enjoys. No he doesn't. It's a place of torment for him also. That's what Scripture says. We just don't know Scripture well enough to know that.

The other thing that I've heard people say to me; I had someone look me in the eye and tell me, "I'm not worried about going to hell. I've been through hell on earth." You might try, but I don't think you can come up with a dumber statement. I don't care what we go through on this side of heaven or this side of hell, this side of eternal life. We still have the sun shine on us. We still have the rain come down. We still have God's grace that's poured out on each of us as he gives us what we need to live. In hell there's none of that. There's no evidence of God's grace anywhere for all eternity. It's all removed from you and there's nothing but unending torment. I don't care what we go through in this world, and we might at times go through some horrific things in this world, I will never deny that, but we never go through hell in this world. There's only one person that went through hell in this world. That was Jesus when he hung on the cross, when he was forsaken by God. That's the only person that has ever walked the face of this earth that has been completely and absolutely forsaken by God, which is hell.

The rest of us still enjoy some of his blessings. He makes the rain and the sun come upon the righteous and the wicked alike is what Scripture says. I don't want to find out how bad hell is. I don't want any of you to either. That's why our God says to us, "Have salt in yourself and be at peace with each other." Quit digging and nitpicking at each other. Live in love with each other and serve each other because God served you first. And where you have failed to do it, quit making excuses. Simply come to the cross and Christ and know that Jesus died for that sin and he was perfect where you have failed, and you are forgiven. You are restored. You are renewed. Then, let that saltiness permeate your life as you live to God's glory.