

## Sermon Matthew 10, You are the salt of the earth

Martin Luther had been preaching already for fourteen years and he would live and preach for another fourteen years. And about halfway through his ministry, in 1532, he preached a sermon on Jesus' words in today's gospel of Matthew about salt.

That the purpose of salt is to preserve, and to bite. Its purpose also is to bring flavor and tastiness to life.

As a Jew, Jesus often put his teaching and parables into recognizable cultural settings of the day, so his audiences and followers would get the meaning and the lesson. Today's story contains vibrant metaphors of lights under bushels, and salt and saltiness.

In first century Judea, one of the most understood and recognizable commodities of the day was salt. It preserved vegetables and fish. Also a saying in Biblical times was *a man's life is as valuable as a bag of salt*. Salt featured prominently in the Jewish purification laws and rituals. When making cereal offerings in the Temple at Harvest time, the Jews always put salt in it so the cereal would not mold or rot. After a birth, Jews washed the new babies in salt water, both for medicinal purposes but also for the symbolism that salt water would help preserve the baby's life.

And when making business deals the Jews would make a covenant with

each other using salt. Instead of written contracts you would take some salt from your house and I took some from mine; and we would throw salt across each other's shoulder. This was the covenant of salt. In time throwing spilt salt over one's shoulder became a gesture of superstition in the western world. I recall once a cousin of mine throwing salt over his shoulder in a crowded restaurant and embarrassingly it landed in the dinner of the person sitting behind.

Historically for all time salt also symbolized the preservation of life, forestalling decay.

And Jesus said, YOU, you are the salt of the earth.

Salt also featured in wartimes. When early wars were fought with bows and arrows, spears and swords, a soldier wounded by a cut would rub salt into the wound, which prevented infection and aided healing, but which again in time became a modern metaphor meaning adding to pain.

You are the salt of the earth.

As well as salt, today's gospel focuses on light and how Christians are meant to live in an often dark world, in our schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, in our circles of friends.

We are to live as the light of Christ, which symbolizes hope. We are to *be* the light of Christ in the world.

So – we are to be salt, and light. Light cutting through darkness, salt preserving that which is good, and stopping decay.

And Jesus said, YOU are to be sharp - like the salt of the earth.

Even allowing for exaggeration, the media coverage of world events makes grim watching and experiencing. Man's inhumanity to man, crimes of violence, perversions and cruelty, terrorist plots and copycat manic behavior, war, genocide, persecution and the breakdown of morality scream at us daily. One child in 5 is living in poverty in America and the homicide rate has increased 800% in 30 years. What can we do about any of this? Are we speaking up enough about it, or keeping our heads down and not taking a stand for what is right, and for those who need us to stand with them?

Jesus would ask what are we doing about it. He who criticized those who hid behind the laws asked the people of his day, and us too who follow his teaching, what about humanity, righteousness and kindness for everyone on God's earth? He famously called the authorities with power but lacking humanity *broods of vipers and hypocrites*. Before him the prophets would also hold the people accountable too. They held the chosen people of God accountable for sins against humanity and for bad behaviors.

Jesus said, YOU, are to be the moral preservers of our world, of our society. You need to help make this society a better place. You need to do

the right thing.

We must try. Keep the salt on our tongues and speak up for what we know we should – the weak, the oppressed, the marginalised, the prisoner, the destitute. *In as much as you do it to the least of these, you do it to me.* Martin Luther summarised it well – salt bites he said. You may need to rub it into the wounds of peoples sins.

The last thing that Martin Luther said in his 1532 sermon in was “Salt is to bring seasoning to life.” Taste, pleasure, joy – the savor of a great friendship or rich encounter with another person. And it needs only a dab of salt to bring that savor to life. We can surely do it.

YOU are the salt of the earth. If the salt has lost its flavor, what use is it to anyone.

What kind of salt are we? Do we help preserve and make palatable our lives to God. Or have we been drifting away from what God wants us to be and do? Salt and light, vital elements. “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven”.

AMEN