

There's an old saying that goes, "you'll catch more flies with sugar than with vinegar." That's generally taken to mean that you can get more accomplished by being kind to people than by being a jerk. And while that can be true, it is worth noting today that Jesus did not look his disciples in the eye and say, "You are the sugar of the earth." He said, "You are the salt of the earth." In what ways are followers of Jesus like salt? You might be surprised...

It's funny that the phrase "salt of the earth" has come to have a meaning all its own. It is often used to describe folks who are down-to-earth, humble, and unpretentious. And don't get me wrong, those are good qualities, but when Jesus looked his disciples in the eye and said, "You are the salt of the earth," He had a lot more in mind than just, "You guys are down-to-earth, humble, unpretentious people."

To really catch what Jesus was getting at, we have to investigate the uses of salt in the ancient world. First off, salt is a preservative. In a world without refrigerators, salt was rubbed into spoiling meat to prevent it from becoming totally rotten. Secondly, salt, then as now, was a flavor enhancer. You may have noticed that if you eat something salty, you become thirsty, a side effect not lost on those who would like to sell you a drink. And salt also has antiseptic qualities. While the thought of literally rubbing salt in a wound might make you cringe, it works if you're trying to prevent infection. For these reasons and more, salt was a valuable commodity, so much so that the phrase "he's worth his salt" reflects the ancient practice of paying soldiers their wages with bags of salt.

So when Jesus tells his disciples, "You are the salt of the earth," it's a compliment. He's saying that they have great value. At the same time, it is a challenge to be unique. It is a challenge to bring God's truth to bear in everyday life—and it is a challenge that extends to you and me.

Jesus says to you this morning, "You are the salt of the earth, so get out there into a world that is rotting away and preserve something." Simply put, Christian people keep our society from totally collapsing in selfishness and greed by living Christ-like lives—and we are meant to be out there with Christ in our society, not circling the wagons in our own little camp. Jesus says to you this morning, "You are the salt of the earth, so get out there into the world with the flavor of the truth." Apart from Jesus, there is no true joy to be found in this world. Apart from Jesus, people chase after this and that, but in the end they're just bored. They don't care anymore. But with Jesus, there is flavor; there is life the way it was meant to be lived, sensing the precious gifts God gives us every day. Jesus says to you this morning, "You are the salt of the earth, so go clean out some wounds." Like salt, the truth about Jesus might irritate the people we're trying to help...at first. But Jesus is all about healing, and the salt we have to share gives life. Jesus kills the infection of sin, and we are called to pour Him into the lives of those who are hurting.

Jesus says to you this morning, "You are the salt of the earth," and those are awesome words. But there is a problem. The problem is, there are many times when we just don't want to be. We don't want to be the salt that Jesus is talking about. We don't want to have that unique flavor and stick out from the crowd.

It's like the college student who was talking to his friend about a coming job up in the north woods. His friend said, "I wonder if you know what you're getting into. That's a pretty rough crowd up there."

When the summer passed, the two met again. The one asked the other: "What was it like being a Christian among those guys?"

"Oh," said the other, "I didn't have any trouble. They never caught on!"

We'd rather blend in and be bland and not rock the boat. And, we don't want the responsibility of trying to preserve a rotting society; it seems too impossible. Nor do we want the hassle and heartbreak of cleaning out somebody else's wounds, not when we have so many of our own; not when I could be doing something else with my time...for me.

Jesus says to you and me this morning that salt that loses its saltiness is worthless. He says that salt that has lost its unique properties gets thrown out and trampled underfoot. It is all too possible to start adopting the world's spoiling values, to become materialistic, to seek our own pleasure first and foremost; and when we do that, we're flirting with the very death of our souls. There is nothing more tragic than someone who goes from salty to tasteless; to see someone exchange the life-giving flavor of Jesus for garbage.

Do not let that happen to you. Be honest with God and yourself; if you've avoided being a salty Christian, confess it to the Lord Jesus. He doesn't want to be at odds with you; He wants to forgive you. He doesn't want apathy to rule your life; He wants you to have the satisfaction that comes from serving Him. He doesn't want to throw you out like old salt; He wants to use you to heal and season and preserve this world. He went through the hell of the cross to take your sins away; He rose again from the dead to give you the victory; He invites you to come and taste these things today at His Table, where he serves you His body and blood. This is the flavor of forgiveness. This is the "salt" that sets you free. This is who you are, in Christ: the salt of the earth.