

The Salt of the Earth

Luke 14:25-35

In our modern world, we quickly become reliant on the reliability of many things. For example, each of us probably has a refrigerator in our home, which we rely on to work to look after the food that needs to be preserved at a constant temperature. If the refrigerator becomes unplugged or it loses power, it makes for a rotten mess.

Salt in ancient world served such a purpose. It not only flavoured food, as we may be used to today, but it also preserved food. In fact, salt in the ancient world was very important. Some uses included:

- It preserved and flavoured food.
- It was used as an antiseptic (we might notice that *Salus* is the Roman goddess of health, and it's from that name that we get our modern word "salt").
- It was used as a currency for payment. A Roman soldier's pay consisted in part of salt, and that part was known as *solarium argentum*, from which we derive today the word "salary". A soldier's pay was cut if he was not performing, because he was "not worth his salt".
- The word "salad" originated from "salt", and that association began with the early Romans salting their leafy greens and salads.

Salt is a valuable commodity in the ancient world, and without it as a preservative, there would be a rotten mess.

In Matthew's Gospel, we hear Jesus preaching and teaching the Sermon on the Mount. In it he says, "You, you disciples are the light of the world." And we still repeat that today when someone is baptised. "You are the light of the world." And Jesus also says with this, "You are the salt of the earth." In our Gospel reading today, Jesus says, "Salt is good; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; they throw it away. Let anyone with ears to hear, listen!"

So, let's listen.

Jesus warns of salt losing its saltiness. Now, salt can't be unplugged or unpowered like a fridge! So at first we might think that salt can't lose its saltiness. Or can it? How about you and me? Is Jesus talking to us? I think so. There is a cost to discipleship. That cost, first and foremost, is borne and worn by the teacher, the master. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem and to the cross. He knows that humanity, people, you and I, stand condemned because of its sin. Jesus' way is the way of the cross in giving his life for us; it is the way of loving and serving the other. That's what we're called to do and to be.

In Luke 14, Jesus has just taught his disciples a parable of a great banquet and of the invitation to all to "come". Come, here is the free gift of the one who serves you. "Come, for I have made everything ready." Today we celebrate that Joshua and Patrick hear that invitation for them. They will receive Holy Communion for the first time today. That is something to truly celebrate with them and their families. Being the salt of the earth is first then to come to the banquet; to come to be served and to be saved.

Come, my disciples, come and receive my amazing grace, the host says. But there are excuses. Yes, but... I've just bought a cow. Yes, but I have just got married. I cannot come. I've got something more important than you, Jesus. And *that* is salt losing saltiness. It should not be. But it's very real and it's very possible, and we need to be challenged again. The call is for us to examine ourselves. For us to determine daily: what do we look like? What's my story within our story, within **the** story at this time?

Our Christian life is one of dying and rising with Christ. That's the baptismal life. At any given time, this is a good self-examination question for me and you as individuals and for us together. And it's one of the questions I'd like to explore answering in a healthy and safe way, as we move through this time of working through the grief we experience, and the further time of change as we prepare to move in six months' time, and all that every day brings for us in life. Salt doesn't lose its saltiness... or at least it is not designed to do so. Jesus says examine yourselves honestly, and be wise in your response.

“Whoever wishes to be my disciple must pick up their cross and follow me. Follow me.

Come to my banquet of grace, where I will feed you and nurture you and I will care for you.”

Learning from Jesus to pick up our cross and following him is being who we are: the salt of the earth. It is, first of all, a renewed invitation to come and receive at the banquet of grace.

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Follow me to the cross, and to the way of serving with this grace in your life. That's my way. That's your way. That's being who you are: salt bringing its good things to the world by giving of yourself for others, to show them my love. And to invite them to me.

Can you begin to imagine our church, our community, our worship, our welcome, our fellowship today, our congregation in the future (whatever the church building is), if someone new came to us and saw us and said, “Wow! No way! That's amazing! Now I get it! Now I know what this Christian stuff is about! Now I know what being a Christian is. People love one another, and sacrifice for each other, and they look to serve. They form a safe place for all people. They really love one another, just as God loves them. Rejoicing in that love and carrying one another through times of trial and sadness.” Wow! Can you imagine that? You and me, being that salt? Carrying that cross? It's who you, me, we are in Christ now. It's God's design. So let's learn anew together. In Jesus, let's be bold in his good care, in his safe place to examine ourselves and to learn from him anew, to pick up our cross and follow where he leads. Like Patrick and Joshua today, let's come to the banquet of grace, grow in that grace, and be who we are called to be. You and I, we, as God's people. We are the salt of the earth. Amen.