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Salty People



February 8, 2026
Matthew 5:13 – 20

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer.

Amen.

Many of you know that every Monday night at 7 p.m. on Zoom, there is a group of us that meets for Bible study. And we've recently begun reading the Gospel of Matthew. In our first meeting, we read the first four chapters. Now, it's a little cheat because the first two chapters we had spent months and months reading prior, but we sped through those. We came through the third and the fourth chapters about Jesus's baptism, his temptation, and the beginning of his ministry. And then we came in chapter five where this reading, this morning's reading comes from. We came to what is known as the Sermon on the Mount. It opens with the Beatitudes, those great sayings of blessing that invert the values of our world. We read those verses last week together, here in worship.

In Bible study, when we hit the Beatitudes we slowed down. The first week we read four verses and two of those verses are Jesus going up a mountain and sitting down. Last week we read two verses. We have slowed down to a crawl because all of the things that Jesus shares with us in the Sermon on the Mount are deep and rich and they deserve being engaged with slowly.

And so today, as we hear these words which come right after the Beatitudes, I'm going to slow us down. Although we've heard many many words I'm just going to focus on that first metaphor that Jesus offers us. He says you are the salt of the earth. What does that mean?

Seems like a simple sentence, but what does he mean? If we are to be the salt of the earth we need to understand what Jesus is inviting us into.

Salt has so many meanings in our lives, so many uses and purposes in our lives. And when we think of salt, we might first of all think of cooking. We cook with salt. We sprinkle salt on things we're going to eat. Makes things taste a little bit better.

Back in the day, back when Jesus was teaching, salt was nowhere near as easy to find and get as it is today. There were only certain places that salt could be mined or made. It was such a precious commodity that it was worth its weight maybe not in gold but in much much money. Some of you may know that our word "salary," what we're paid for the jobs we do in life, comes from the word for salt. That's how precious salt was.

And salt was that precious because without salt we die. We literally die if we don't eat salt. That's it. Game over. Jesus is telling us that without us, without the followers of his path, of his way, without us shining this little light of ours, the world will die. It's helpful, but maybe we still don't understand what he's trying to get at. Salt is also used to make things taste better, right? When we're cooking, it's like, oh, that needs a little bit of salt. Not because we think without that little bit of salt we're going to die, but because it's going to taste better. There's something about what we can give the world as followers of Christ that will make the world taste better. It will make life better. Not just give life, but make it better.

In the ancient Near East, in ancient Israel, salt was also thought to not just have physical powers but spiritual powers. Salt was thought to be able to purify oneself spiritually. So, I think many of you know I love horror movies and so I watch these movies. In some horror movies, you'll have this moment where someone makes a circle of salt to keep an unclean spirit contained, or to keep an unclean spirit outside. Jesus is telling us that to be people of salt, we are invited to do the work of containing or excluding impure spirits, unclean behaviors, the brokenness that surrounds us.

The other way we might be thinking about salt today is with all this cold winter weather, we're using a lot of salt, aren't we? We're sprinkling it on our driveways. We're putting it on our stairs. It's helping us to melt the ice and the snow that is all around us. It's giving us a sure footing. This winter has been so cold and so snowy that there are some places that have run out of salt.

If you have been looking at Facebook, or maybe looking at videos on YouTube, you may have seen memes or videos or postings that say salt melts ice. And these are banners that are being held by the protesters in Minneapolis. They are calling for the power and the terror and the occupation of ICE in their cities, which has led literally to death and fear all around them to be melted. Salt has that ability.

Jesus is asking us to be a people of salt. To be a people who gives life, makes life better, creates boundaries that exclude the brokenness and the evil or helps to contain it, that empowers those who are living in fear and disempowers those who use fear to control. I

think these are all different ways of looking at this metaphor that Jesus is offering us when he asks us to be the salt of the earth.

That's great. But how do we become the salt of the earth? We understand maybe some of its values, some of what we might be called to do, but how do we become this salt? How do we become these salty people?

He's already told us.

And he told us in the Beatitudes. I don't think it is any coincidence that Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, that first time when he opens his mouth and goes so deeply into the sharing of his vision for his new community, for the new communion that he is trying to create, that he sets forth a set of values and actions. He tells us we are to be peacemakers. He tells us that we are to be those who are poor in spirit. He tells us that we are to be those who are thirsty and hungry for righteousness. He tells us that we are to be the people who suffer for what is right.

This is how we become a salty people.

This is why our ministry in the world is going to mean so much when we think about all of the challenges that face us, not just in this community, but further afield. These are the values and the actions and the roles which Christ is calling us to inhabit and to manifest.

You might go a step deeper and say, "Well, how can we be peacemakers? What does it mean to hunger and thirst for righteousness? How are we supposed to mourn?"

You may have seen an email from me this week inviting all of us to take a survey together. It is based on the question of whether or not we as a congregation wish to be more involved, more engaged with what is going on around us in this world. And if so, what that might look like. I think it is out of a conversation like this that we deepen our saltiness. The way we answer these questions and engage in this conversation has the potential to make us more salty in this moment in history. So, if you have not already responded to the survey, I invite you to look in your inbox, maybe in your spam folder, depending upon where my emails go. Take a minute. It literally takes only one or two minutes to respond to this survey. If by some chance you are technologically challenged, we have hard copies of this survey. You can simply fill that out and submit it.

Christ follows his invitation to become salty people with a warning. He says, "If you are a salty people and you have lost your saltiness, what are you actually good for?" It's powerful. We, as a congregation, should ask ourselves these questions. If in this moment, when a vision of life, of tastiness, of protection and disempowering those who use terror to control us, if in this moment we aren't going to be a salty people, when are we going to be a salty people?

Amen.