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Salt of the Earth
Matthew 5:13

I've just come from the beach in San Diego,
And the wonderful smell of the ocean,
And that beautiful *salty water*
That you just can't find in this part of the country.

And in studying our passage for today about salt—I'm overwhelmed by just how amazing this little mineral really is.

Salt has a taste, smell, feel, and property all its own.
And its *uses* are almost innumerable.

Did you know that little babies in biblical times would be washed in salt water after their birth?

They used the salt water for medicinal purposes to preserve the baby's life?
"Salty Christians", Edward Markquart, Epiphany 5A, Sermons from Seattle.

Salt has always been used as a *preservative*.

In ancient times, salt was absolutely essential.

In fact, there was a saying that a bag of salt was as valuable as a man's life.

The Interpreter's Bible, pg. 288,

Without refrigeration, salt was necessary to preserve food.

It could preserve vegetables, meat, especially fish for the winter time; by drying it out.

Salt was necessary to *preserve* life and prevent decay.

Salt was so valuable, it was also used to *make promises*.

There are more than 30 references to salt in the Bible.

God tells the people to use salt with their offerings, in their food, and in their covenants.

When Jews offered their cereal offerings,
They would always put salt on the cereal so it would not mold or rot.
But they also did it because the Lord ordered them to salt it.

Jews would make a **covenant** with each other by using salt.
If we were going to make an important deal with each other,
there was no written contract.
You would take some salt from your house;
I would take some salt from my house;
and we would throw salt across each other's shoulder.
It was called the covenant of salt.
Salt symbolized the preservation of a contract.

"Salty Christians", Edward Markquart, Epiphany 5A, Sermons from Seattle.

Salt was also used during **war**.
Some wars have even been fought for salt.
But the use of salt was primarily for those wounded while fighting in the wars.
It was packed into the fresh bleeding wounds, causing more pain at the
moment, but ultimately healing the wounded. Salt meant healing.

The Salt Institute. "Facts on File"

We know that eating salt is necessary to keep **our bodies** in balance,
to keep electrolytes in order.
Salt helps to regulate our blood pressure and blood volume.
It literally preserves our ability to think, eat, work, play, and sleep.

It's a **miracle** mineral really—
So having it and keeping it, was vitally important in Jesus' time.

So was **keeping it pure**.
Salt itself does not lose its saltiness, but it can become impure.
Devious people would mix it with sand, so it became useless.
Salt collected from marshes or the sea could be mixed with other minerals,
and if collected or stored incorrectly it would lose its flavor.

So when Jesus said 'if salt has lost its taste it's useless'....
He was talking about it becoming impure, bland, mixed in with other things so
it's no longer salty.

In a recent issue of *The Christian Century*, a youth ministry expert named Kenda Creasy Dean suggests that perhaps many of us American Christians Have ***lost our saltiness***.

She fears we often fail to be salt in this world, as faithful disciples. She fears that we are failing to present the Christian faith as true salt— Something honest, exciting, important, worthy of our devotion, Something we should actually be teaching our children.

Instead, she believes we are giving or even just expecting our kids to pick up a watered-down version of Christianity, which she comically describes as MTD—which stands for ***Moralistic Therapeutic Deism***.

Quite simply it's a ***banal, bland alternative version*** of Christianity.

Here it is:

*The goal of life is to be happy and feel good about yourself.
And believe in a God who wants people to be nice and fair,
A God who can be found in the Bible and all other religions,
Who is not involved in our lives except to help us with problems,
A God who takes all the good people to heaven when they die.*

After talking to countless teens, MTD is the primary religious view Found today in Protestant, and Catholic congregations. And here's the real tragedy, so many young people, who they've found tend to mirror the faith of their parents, believe that their faith is just something nice to have like a bank account— there to draw on just when you need it, but not anything more.

She says something we should all be thinking about, "*we provide serious coaching and teachers for sports and SAT scores, but we blithely assume that religious identity will happen by osmosis and will emerge 'when youth are ready' (a confidence we generally lack when it comes to say, algebra).*

"Faith, Nice and Easy", Kenda Creasy Dean, *Christian Century*, Aug. 10, 2010.

We all know that Christianity is not MTD!
It's ***more than something nice*** like a bank account!
It's a relationship with a Person—with Jesus Christ,
Who doesn't make all of life nice and fair and just take us to heaven,
He gives our lives their ultimate ***purpose and meaning***, no matter what.

Following our **Triune God** is life-changing, the Spirit is our advocate, the Father our Creator, the Son our Savior.

And we **make promises** at each baptism that we adults will live by these truths ourselves, and teach them to every young person growing up in this family of faith.

So, **how are we doing?**

How can we do a **better job**—how can we be salt of the earth for our kids? We sure don't want to lose our saltiness when it comes to our own faith, or the faith of our kids!

This is the heart of Jesus' message—we are the salt of the earth. We are called to help **preserve** the faith, keep things in balance, keep promises, make covenants, and heal wounds.

And here's something interesting—the Greek word for salt **losing its flavor** also means to act foolishly, or dishonestly.

If we lose our flavor, if we stop preserving the faith, balance, promises, covenants, healing wounds by acting foolishly or dishonestly, we are like salt that's only good for providing some extra traction on the road.

Jesus said **YOU are the salt** of the earth. He gave responsibility to his followers.

You know what this means?

It means we can't just sit around and **complain** about how our Church needs this or that for the kids that are growing up in it.... Or how our country or our culture is just going down the drain..... Without getting up and doing something about it—

As salt of the earth we are supposed to be preserving and providing the morality, faithfulness, honesty and healing--all around us.

Are we doing that?

Are we **salt** in the lives of those in our midst?

It's not always an *easy* task.....easier to just complain about how Other people have lost their saltiness and need to be thrown out.

The famous pastor and reformer **Martin Luther** had plenty to say about salt. He says, that when people in your congregation sin, you should pour salt into the wounds of their sins.

Ooh, that doesn't sound good.

But think about what he's really saying—he's saying, **be honest** with folks.

Help people heal from their sins and their wounds.

Luther once said, "*Bishops and successful clergy are the smartest of people, for they preach in a calculated manner in order to keep themselves out of trouble by refusing to salt the sins of their people and press for genuine repentance.*"

Yikes. I'm afraid he hit the nail on the head.

To be worth our salt we as pastors need to **salt the parishioners**—challenge you, tell you the truth, pour salt into your wounds to bring about healing.

To be worth your salt, you have to **do the same** for one another.

Often friends are not honest with each other,

and we as friends need to be honest and real with each other.

We need to hold one another accountable in our faith.

Do you have anyone who **keeps you salty**?

Anyone who you encourage to be salt of the earth?

In the novel, *A Diary of a Country Priest*, there is a wonderful line when the author says of pastors, "Pastors? They are the **syrup** of the earth."

When we see a problem in someone's life, the tendency is to just **pour syrup** on their behavior, and be super sweet to them.

But maybe they need a little bit of salt to help heal their wounds, instead of letting them stay open.

Maybe they need you to be real about yourself and your sins instead of just ignoring all the problems.

And if you have a friend or loved one who is willing to pour some salt into **your wounds** for healing, and challenge you to change, you are truly fortunate.

I have a couple of and mentors who are willing to tell me like it is, and boy do I need it. They can pour some salt and say to me—
Really? You did that? What were you thinking?
They can ask me---Is that what God would have you do?
Are you staying in God's Word? Are you praying through it?

They can honestly say---It's ok, I've been there too. Let me pray with you.
I'll be praying for you.
I'm here for you as you try again.

Jesus says to each one of us---YOU are the salt of the earth.

So are we *being salty*?
Are we true to what God would have us be and do?

What about the people *sitting all around you*?
Are you caring for them? Being real with them? Sharing your faith with them?
Are you salty? Or have you lost some of your flavor?

What about the *needy* who come to our doors?
Or the **kids** at Mills Elementary?
The people served by *Meals* on Wheels?
Our sister church in *Malawi*?
are we doing everything we can to be salt for them?

It's not easy being salty salt....
easier to be the kind of salt that provides traction on the road.

But being salt of the earth is what Jesus has called us to be and do,
And the rewards are fantastic.
We slowly but surely become new creations in Christ,
and we get to see others change right before our very eyes.
What a gift, what a journey.

Next time you pull out the salt shaker....
remember to pour a little salt out of your life. Amen.