

SERMON – October 11th, 2009

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me,” dear fellow redeemed, Mark 9:38-50

Salt or sodium chloride is a necessity for life. We need salt to balance the fluids in our body. Too much salt, however, can lead to serious health problems like high blood pressure. Some salt is good. Too much salt is bad. As Americans we consume roughly twice as much salt as we should. This is in part responsible for health risks like high blood pressure. But Jesus had no trouble with having too much salt of the spiritual variety. For the Christian there can never be too much spiritual salt in our life. Christians are to be salty – very salty, that is, they are to be well-seasoned in their Christianity. Salt or being salty is good for the Christian. Jesus told us that as his followers we are not only the light of the world but that we are also the salt of the earth. Christians are lights and Christians are salt. As Jesus speaks to us again about salt in our text each of us is reminded “BE A SALTY CHRISTIAN.” We are salty Christians 1) by encouraging other Christians, 2) by crucifying the sinful flesh, and 3) by undergoing persecution.

The Apostle John brings up a little incident they had encountered on one of the disciples’ missionary trips in the towns and villages. There was a man they had met who was miraculously driving out demons in Jesus’ name. After the Transfiguration when Jesus together with Peter, James and John rejoined the other disciples, there was a man in the crowd who said that he had brought his demon possessed son to the disciples but they couldn’t drive out the demon. Interesting, isn’t it? Jesus’ disciples couldn’t drive out the demon, at least in this case, but this other man was driving out demons in Jesus’ name. Jesus told them not to stop this man. He added, “Whoever is not against us is for us.” That man was a believer. He was doing the work of the Lord. In fact, Jesus says, even those do such a small thing as giving a cup of cold water in his name as evidence of their faith will certainly not lose their eternal reward. The reward such believers receive, of course, is a reward of God’s grace through faith in Jesus as their Savior. Instead of criticizing the work that was being done in his name, a salty Christian should appreciate that work and thank God for all those who serve their Savior.

A word of caution, however. As salty Christians we certainly want to thank God for the work being done in our Savior’s name, but we cannot in any way condone any kind of false teaching other disciples of Jesus might be hanging on to. We are not to join with them in the Lord’s work. Rather, God through his word tells us to warn them of their false teaching. Like a sick person who needs immediate medical attention, those who hold on to any false teaching need serious spiritual attention. Paul compares false teaching to gangrene. It is destructive. Its only purpose is to destroy faith. That same Apostle John warns his readers in his second epistle, “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him.” He is referring to the support of traveling preachers who are not preaching God’s Word in its truth and purity. Paul writes to Titus, “Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him.” Warn him because his false is harmful to his faith and those who listen to him. Jesus himself said, “Watch out for false prophets.” Warning those who trust in false teaching is the most loving thing we could do. We thank God for our fellow Christians who believe in Jesus as their Savior, but we also want to help them see the seriousness and destructiveness of any false teaching. Again John writes in his third epistle, “It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.”

As a Christian we are salty when we encourage our fellow Christians, on the one hand appreciating the work they do for the Lord but also warning them of the danger of false teaching. Jesus says that a salty Christian also remains salty by crucifying the sinful flesh.

Out of love for our fellow Christians, especially the little ones – those who are weak in their faith struggling with false teaching or some specific sin, we would never want to offend them and cause them to sin. We wouldn’t want to anger them or discourage them in their faith. We want to encourage and built them up in the faith by leading them to God’s Word as their only source of spiritual comfort and strength. After this warning of offense caused to others, Jesus then turns the discussion to the disciples themselves and their faith and Christian life. He reminds them just how dangerous sin is and how important it is to avoid sin at all costs.

Listen again to Jesus' strong statement (read v.43-48). Is Jesus really advocating cutting off our hand or foot or gouging out our eye? There is the matter of the Fifth Commandment in which God commands us not to hurt or harm others or ourselves but to value his gift of life. However, we need to take sin seriously. Sin needs to be dealt with severely and harshly. We will want to do everything we can so that we don't sin because one sin leads to another and then to another and then another. It is possible to lose faith. It happens. It may happen to someone in our family. Jesus is not advocating self-mutilation but self-mortification, crucifying our sinful flesh. Sin has to be addressed immediately and harshly. We need to confess our sin in true sorrow for having offended and angered our holy God. We will then flee to Christ's cross where our sin was dealt with once and for all by Jesus himself. On the cross he bore the guilt and was thrown into hell paying the price for all our sins with his suffering and death. We place our trust in him alone for full and free forgiveness.

Based on Jesus' words it would be foolish for us as well-seasoned Christians, salty Christians, to take sin lightly. Yet, we do. We brush it off as something that's not as bad as what others are doing. We excuse our recurring sin as just our weakness against a particular temptation that someday we will be able to overcome. Have we really convinced ourselves of that? At what point will we realize that this sin is not going away. How long before it causes serious damage to our relationships and our reputation? This lax attitude toward sin is really going to bring us down one of these days. God himself may intervene and do something drastic because he loves us. Before we get to that point we heed the words of Jesus and crucify our sinful flesh right now. We bow humbly before God acknowledging what wretched sinners we are. We confess our sins for what they are – a complete lack of love toward God and our neighbor. We let our sinful nature have it for all its evil that leads to sinful thoughts, words and actions. Then we let the blood of Christ our Savior cover us and wash us clean of every guilty stain. Renewed in our forgiveness we now strive like never before to fight against temptation with the power of God's Word, clothed with his mighty armor of truth, righteousness, and peace so that we do not commit those same sins again.

As salty, well-seasoned Christians we understand the necessity of crucifying our sinful flesh. But we are not finished yet. Salty Christians also undergo persecution, a salting with fire so to speak.

Jesus reminds us that even though we will escape the fires of hell through faith in him, we will have our own fires to endure, the fires of persecution for being a Christian. It's what makes us salty and a better preservative for this sinful world. Christians that aren't very salty, that don't act as the preserving force of what is right and God-pleasing in the world, aren't worth very much. That is salt that has lost its saltiness. It's very hard to be made salty again as Jesus states. Christians who buckle under persecution and fail to do God's will or say, "This is what the Lord says," lose their saltiness. Christians are constantly under fire from every angle that challenges their saltiness. Christians are under the magnifying glass with every step they take and every move they make. And Jesus would have it no other way. As Christians we are the salt of the earth. We are always being tested and refined by the fires of suffering and persecution. But passing through those fires makes us even saltier. Jesus tells us to have salt in ourselves, to be salty. We are to stand up not militantly but lovingly to all anti-Christian talk and behavior. Salty Christians make it clear that we don't think that way, talk that way or act that way. But we do it in a loving and peaceful way as Jesus would. We want to spread our saltiness. We want others to know what we know – the love of God in Christ Jesus. John writes in his first epistle, "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

Be a salty Christian. Encourage fellow Christian for their service to the Lord but also help them to see the dangers of false teaching. Crucify your sinful flesh by killing, drowning, and beating down your sinful nature in true repentance and don't ever take sin lightly. Finally, undergo the fires of persecution as the salt of the earth. Christians are the only preserving force this world has from spiritual decay and eternal destruction. That's a lot to ask of weak and sometimes weary Christians. But the strength Jesus supplies through his Word is more than enough to enable us to be salty Christians in an unsalted world. Amen.