

September 27, 2009

Scripture: Mark 9: 38-50

Sermon: "Have you lost your flavor?"

Salt. Before this sermon, I never really thought about how basic salt was to life. I admit, I take salt for granted. Sure I know that salt is in the food that I ate. Sure I know that salt is an essential element for our bodies to continue to be healthy. Sure I know that salt has many purposes in our world. But to tell you the truth, I have never really thought about salt. It just was. It just is. It is just a part of life.

So all week, I have struggled with why Jesus needs to talk about salt in this passage. Why Jesus needs to say that we need to have salt within ourselves and why Jesus needs to warn us about salt losing its saltiness. I kept coming back to the text and saying, "Jesus no one wants a sermon on the properties of salt. That's not a message that's going to keep them coming back for more. Salt is boring. It's just there. It is a part of life. No one wants a sermon on salt. What in the world does salt have to do with the Kingdom of God? Where is the good news in salt? Jesus couldn't you come up with some better metaphors?"

Jesus and I have these types of conversations all the time and usually something happens that shows me why Jesus said the things that he said. This week, my teaching moment came in the form of a phone call. It was a friend of mine, calling to share an experience and to vent her frustration at the big "c" Church once more. And to ask what was the church's purpose really. My friend said that the phone rang in the church office one day and the secretary answered it. And the voice on the other line said that she was a single mother with three children. She had lost her job a few months ago and she was at a really low point. She didn't have any food in her house and the rent was overdue and she was facing eviction. Could the church help? The secretary told her that she needed to check a few things and that she would call her back. The secretary called the coordinator and explained the situation and wondered is there anything that the church could do.

Only to hear "Tell her we can't help her. We only help people in our county and she lives in the next county over."

My friend went on to explain that the church secretary ignored the coordinator and helped the woman out anyway. And then she said, "What's the point of calling yourself a church if you aren't going to be the church and serve God's people anyway?"

My teaching moment of the week! We as churches and as people of faith are called to serve! We are called to be the salt of the earth, to be worthy servants of our God! We are called to see beyond boundaries and the lines that separate us and to see the things that unite us, our basic core elements: grace, peace, hope, love, welcome and most importantly: service. Just like there are some basic elements that unite our bodies and give us life.

That's what Mark is talking about in our Scriptures today. He is inviting us as readers to put aside what divides us and celebrates us: our saltiness, our desire to serve, our desire to enhance the lives of others, our desire to preserve justice for all of God's people, our abilities to flavor the

bland existence of others with the seasonings of the Kingdom of God: Grace, peace, love, welcome and service.

Mark is also reminding us that as people of faith, we lose our way sometimes, that our saltiness loses its ability to season, that our desire to serve sometimes stands in the way of the work of the Kingdom of God. And we have a responsibility to get back to the basics and renew, restore our purpose as the people of God.

Mark tells us that when Jesus heard that the disciples stopped a man from healing just because this man was not a part of their group, he knew that he had to go back to basics. He had to break down the Kingdom of God into its core elements and remind the disciples of how these core elements make up a community of faith. Jesus knew that he had to go back to Chemistry 101 and remind his disciples of how the different elements are suppose to interact with each other and how the different elements of faith, grace, hope, peace, love and welcome make up the Body of Christ. He knew that he had to get them to see what unites them, not what divides them. He knew that he had to get the disciples to recognize that they had forgotten their purpose and that their “saltiness” had lost its ability to season the Kingdom of God with grace, peace, hope, love, and welcome.

He reminds them by saying, “Disciples, you have got it all wrong. There are just some basic elements, basic flavors that make up the Kingdom of God. That make a community of faith a community of faith, that make a believer a believer. It’s all about chemistry and interaction. Just like there are some basic elements that make up your body. Let’s take for example salt. What happens when you get too much salt in your diet? It raises your blood pressure and dehydrates the body. Now what happens when you don’t have enough salt in your body? The body has no energy. The body has no zest. The body is listless.

The same goes for the Body of Christ.

Let’s take: grace, peace, hope, faith, love, service.

What happens when you have too many of these basic elements. The Body of Christ becomes rigid and tight. People begin to think that their way is the only way, that everyone else is wrong. People begin to shut out other voices. People begin to think that they can do this all on their own and God simply becomes a minor character. And then The Body of Christ breaks down.

Now what happens when you don’t have enough of grace, peace, hope, faith, service, and welcome. The Body of Christ is lifeless, listless, and no energy.

You have to find a balance. Grace, peace, service, hope, love and welcome are all essential elements for all believers and for all communities of faith.

Too much: exclusion, fights, no conversation, no room for the Holy Spirit to move. The church leaves God out of the conversation.

Too little: no purpose, no movement, no service, no caring, no energy. The churches leaves the work of the Kingdom to God alone and they wait on the sidelines until the final seconds of the game.

When the Body becomes too rigid or too lifeless, it is the church's responsibility and the people's responsibility to get back to the basics, to remember what unites them and not divides them, to get back their "saltiness" by remember their purpose: and that is to serve God's people, to love God's people, to welcome God's people, to share God's grace with all of God's people.

In our Scripture today, Mark is reminding his community of their call, their basic purpose as people of faith. They aren't a church simply because they say that they are a church. There are some elements. There are some core flavors that make up the recipe for God's Kingdom: Grace, peace, hope, love, welcome and service. Their "saltiness" if you will.

And when the church loses its saltiness, the church forgets to be the church.

Just like what happens to our bodies without the basic element of salt. our bodies suffer and break down. Without a balance of these items, grace, peace, love, service, welcome, the Body of Christ suffers and break down. Without these basic elements, the Body of Christ loses its purpose.

And "if we as the people of God, lose our purpose to honor and worship the Lord, to serve one another, we are like salt that has lost its intended purpose and is only good to be destroyed."

Mark reminds his community and us today that these basic elements, grace, peace, love, hope, service and welcome flavor the Kingdom of God. They add spice to our lives as believers. They enhance our experiences as people of faith here on earth. They add flavor to our lives as disciples of Christ.

Mark reminds his community and us today that we are called to share the basic elements that make up the Body of Christ with all of God's children. We are called to pass the salt down the table and let everyone sprinkle a little grace, peace, hope, love, service and welcome on the feast of life that God has spread out before us.

Mark reminds his community and us today that all God's children are invited to the table, that all of God's children are a part of the Body of Christ, that all God's children are invited to taste and see that God is good, to taste the flavors of grace, peace, hope, love, service and welcome. Mark reminds his community and us today that there is a balance to the Kingdom of God, that there is a balance to the Body of Christ. That there are some core elements that make up the church.

Too much and there is exclusion, fights, brokenness.

Too little and there is no purpose, no movement, no energy, no life.

In our Scripture today, Mark reminds us of our purpose as people of faith. We are called to be the salt of the earth. We are called to be the voice to the voiceless. We are called to spread the good news. We are called to serve our Lord and serve one another. We are called to share the flavors of the Kingdom of God. We are called to say to this world you do not have the last word. God does.

We are called to invite all of God's children to the table and pass the salt. And when we lose our purpose, when we lose our balance, there is danger that we lose our saltiness and will not be able to be the people that God created us to be.

We live in a world where the church has a bad name. Too many stories about how ministers have abused the trust of his or her congregations. Too many stories of how the church remained silent in the face of injustice. Too many stories of how people of faith exclude others. Too many stories of how the Body of Christ has either broken down or become lifeless.

When Jesus tells us to keep salt within ourselves, he is reminding us that we are made up of very basic elements: grace, hope, peace, love, service, and welcome. And that we are called to add flavor to the Kingdom of God through these elements. That we are called to share these elements to add spice to life for all of God's children. That we are called to taste and see that God is good.

May we never lose our saltiness as people of faith. Amen.

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