

September 26, 2021

Mark 9:38-50

“Put Salt On Everything”

How many of you have ever had a health care professional tell you to lower your salt intake? And how many of you followed that advice? It is hard to give up salt...really hard. Salt enhances flavors you didn't know were there. In the ancient world the virtues of salt as a miracle of food preparation were well known. Why let little things like high blood pressure, stroke or a variety of other challenges keep us from the salt we love? We are told to avoid salt and fat – and most things that taste good have salt or fat in them. Ugh.

Of course, you can almost always find someone to tell you what you want to hear. A comedian from days gone by used to say, *“I have a great doctor – if you can't afford the surgery, he'll touch up the x-rays.”*

Jesus disciples were in the habit of touching up the x-rays. Last week we saw them choosing to ignore God's hand in suffering and argue over who is the greatest. This week we see a second verse of that same song: *“Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name - but he isn't one of us – so we stopped him.”* They expect Kudos from Jesus and are reprimanded instead.

There is a lot going on there. The disciples failed to cast out a demon earlier in Mark, so they experience insult to injury. Not only is he not part of their group – and taking orders from them - but he is also better at what Jesus does than they are. There might be some *bruised ego* here leading to poor judgement. We know from experience this can be a real danger. ***Don't let life's hurts be your north star for decision making.*** It rarely ends well.

This passage is hard. It does tell us about following Jesus – but it is a grab bag of stories, ideas, and phrases. My English teacher in High School would give Mark the same grade he gave me on my Senior research paper...which was not good.

Mark has things here which fit together under *the umbrella of the coming passion of Jesus and our seeking to be like him*. But it is not a logical progression, and it is filled with distractions. You did not imagine it when listening to the scriptures this morning...it felt a lot like... “squirrel!”

Probably the biggest distraction is the translation of the place name Gehenna as “hell.” It is the flashing thing that gets our attention when it is no more than wallpaper on the story. You are not being threatened with damnation in this passage. You **are being called** to as much discipleship as you can muster... because it is that important. Nothing is more important than living life with and for God who loves us.

Disciples of every age struggle to understand our place in the world as God’s children and not be distracted by the values we learn as human children: “Whoever dies with the most toys wins” and “whoever has the gold makes the rules, and deserves to.” As those who live as citizens of God’s kingdom, we are called to be counter cultural here. Not because we have been threatened – but because we have been called. The adventure of faith takes all have to give.

The end of our passage has three sayings about salt which have been stitched together. Stitched together not as a logical argument but as different facets of the same jewel. Remember salt cleanses, preserves, and flavors. We struggle to understand how strong this imagery was for Jesus’ hearers because we all have salt at home on the table and don’t give it a second thought. But salt was considered one of the things that made life better. It is a big deal.

Salt cleanses – we will be salted with fire – *we will live sacrificial lives for God who loves us.* We will not waste the goodness given to us by ignoring it and letting it slip away. We will understand we are to be cleansed, preserved, and flavored within ourselves so we are fit to live in relationship with each other. Not one of these observations about salt tells us we should decide our neighbor isn’t worthy of God’s love because they don’t measure up. God’s spirit and life are fully capable of working in our neighbors as well. Having been cleansed by God – we are able to preserve life – and make it more flavorful for those with whom we live.

So, friends, without ignoring health care professionals – let’s put salt on everything. Cleansing, preserving, and bringing richness of flavor to every corner of our lives – may we find the ways of God to live with one another in peace.

Go ahead, go crazy: put salt on everything.