

2/2/2020 - Matthew 4:12-17, 23-25 N.T. pg. 1377, 8 – “News About Jesus Spread”

We are often reminded how Jesus directs us to be his witnesses, to spread the news about Jesus and his kingdom. For example, on the week of the public reception of our 10 new members, we heard Acts 1:8, which I ask us to read together from our bulletin now: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Look now in our bulletin to the start of the worship service. We always begin worship by gathering. Now look at the end of the service. We always end with sending. Our purpose is to gather together as the Body of Christ, as the church, to be sent. Church, ecclesia, means – klesia - the ones called - ek - out. To be called out as witnesses is our task, as followers of Jesus.

As such, I just returned from hearing reports of missionaries & evangelists from all world continents, except Antarctica, who gathered to witness about how we are sent to places in order to glorify Christ & to proclaim his kingdom, to bear witness to the advancement of the kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. At the conference I got to pray for a young couple for whom I prayed as they dated, at their wedding, & at their discerning their call of how to serve Jesus together in their marriage. I prayed at the event as they were commissioned as missionaries for Japan! I also spoke with a young man that I had prayed for as he was discerning a new call, where he once was as an English as a 2nd language teacher in South Korea, & is now there as a missionary for all of East Asia. I then heard a report from a Chinese pastor in Flushing, NY, who is opening a Chinese seminary there. This fall during world communion Sunday weekend when we first prayed for China as a congregation, he too was praying with 2000 Chinese people in Los Angeles. Now we continue praying & conducting a Chinese/English Bible study here in Pataskala. What a blessing, since I have had a heart for Asia, since I was a teenager. Thank you, congregation & session of FPCP, for giving me the time & means to go to this awesome world gathering, so that I can return & report to you how “News About Jesus Spread” to the ends of the earth! Spreading news about Jesus is the biblical topic of the message today.

But the specific focus is on a single verse from the sermon on the mount. The sermon on the mount will be our source of upcoming messages for the season of Lent, leading up to Holy Week and Easter. Please look at the bulletin cover, which illustrates Matthew 5:13: printed in your bulletin: “**You are the salt of the earth.** But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.” Today God draws our attention to salt and how we are “the salt of the earth.”

This metaphor may or may not be well received by us. For one thing, being called “salty” is not usually a complement. It can mean that we are mean. For another thing, we may have been cautioned to control salt intake so as not to retain water or increase blood pressure. Although salted sea caramel is now a craze, salt shakers on every table are not as common as once were.

But in the ancient world & Biblical times, salt had a very important role & significance, which can help us to understand why Jesus tells his disciples that we are the salt of the earth. For thousands of years, salt has been an integral part of diet, preserving food, and healing. Salt, therefore, has a huge role in biblical & world history.

<https://realsalt.com/a-brief-history-of-salt/> and <https://seasalt.com/salt-101/about-salt/history-of-salt>

In the Bible, the covenant between God and the Aaronic priesthood in Numbers 18:19 is sealed with salt. Likewise, in 2Chronicles 13:5, the covenant with the Davidic kings of Israel is sealed with salt. Because salt is a preservative, a covenant of salt may imply permanency. In addition, the Latin word for salt is the root of the Latin word for “salvation.” In Jewish tradition, at the Passover seder meal, a sprig of parsley is dipped in salty water before eating it to remember how the Hebrew people are delivered by God in being able to safely pass through the parted waters of the Red Sea. Both salvation & salt carry an effect of healing.

History also records that salt production, once a difficult process, became a profitable industry. Its success had a factor in the establishment of certain civilizations. As a result, in 2200 BC, China levied the first known tax in world history on salt. Later, other nations followed suit. Salt roads developed as major trade routes. In Tibet, Ethiopia, and other places, salt was used as currency and still is in certain areas of the world. After all, in ancient times, salt had the same value as gold! Thus, Greek slave traders bartered salt for slaves, giving rise to the expression “not worth his salt.” Roman legionnaires were paid in salt, *salarium*, the Latin origin of our word “salary.” The word “salad” also originated from the early Romans habit of salting their leafy greens & vegetables. The words “sauce” & “sausage” are also derived from the word salt.

The importance of salt continues thru time. Venice rose to economic greatness thru its salt monopoly. Salt mines & cities like Salzburg, Austria are landmarks reflecting the worth of salt. Like tea in the American colonies, the tax on salt contributed to the French Revolution. Another military example is that thousands of Napoleon’s troops died during his retreat from Moscow because reports say that their wounds would not heal due to the lack of salt. In 1777, there is record that the British Lord Howe was jubilant when he succeeded in capturing General Washington’s salt supply.

Yes, salt affected US history, too. From 1790 thru 1860, salt was produced in numerous United States, including Ohio, by boiling brine in salt furnaces. That means that at the founding of this church, salt was an important production in Ohio. In 1794, when salt was worth from \$6 to \$8 a bushel, an expedition went near the Scioto River for the discovery of the salt springs said to be worked by the native Americans near the present town of Jackson, I just passed on my trip.

(<https://meigsindynews.com/2019/04/18/early-salt-mining-history-in-the-ohio-valley/>)

Those who worked in production were under the danger of attack over the precious commodity of salt from a tribe in Chillicothe. The first settlers in Meigs County got their salt from these Scioto salt works. Reports indicate that the salt works was a place of considerable trade. Young men, on coming of age, went there to chop wood or tend kettles to make money. It appears from old account books that salt rated as high as \$2 per bushel in Rutland Township as late as 1820. After the Rutland furnaces began to make 200 bushels of salt per week the prices came down to 50 cents a bushel. Then, after salt was made in large quantities along the Ohio River the works on the creek became unprofitable, and the manufacture of salt was discontinued.

Ohio still produces 5 million tons of rock salt every year, much of it mined by Morton Salt. The company opened in 1958 a mine in Fairport Harbor, 30 miles east of Cleveland. Today the mine employs about 170 people. 110 work underground, pulling 1.3 tons of salt from the earth each year.

https://geosurvey.ohiodnr.gov/portals/geosurvey/PDFs/Mineral_Industries_Reports/01minind.pdf

Licking County, named by white settlers, is named for salt licks. Here, close to home thru at least 2011, the R. H. Penick Company, in Newark produced salt. The company was in operation thru 2018, though no longer producing salt in its final years.

Now that we have a biblical, historical, and even local geographical grasp of the importance of salt, can we understand why Jesus says that we are the salt of the earth? One Internet site reveals over 14,000 good uses for salt today. Let's highlight the major ones.

<https://seasalt.com/salt-101/about-salt/salt-uses-and-tips>

As already mentioned, one use of salt is for preservation. Jesus says, "We are the salt of the earth." We are to bear witness to the kingdom on this earth. We are to spread news about Jesus. In other words, we are to preserve the Christian faith, as bearers of Jesus, spreading faith in the world. Preservation is one major purpose of salt.

When spread rightly and in the right amount, salt also enhances the flavor of food. We spread salt. We don't eat it by the spoonful or dispense it in clumps. As we model Jesus in our lives, we will hopefully make faith palatable to others, who hunger to be in relationship with Jesus, too. We already looked at the maps in our bulletin and scripture in Matthew 4 to hear how news about Jesus spread, like salt, when he ministered here on earth.

And since the time of Jesus' ascension and the pouring out like salt of the Holy Spirit, through his church, through his disciples like us, news about Jesus has spread to the ends of earth, as evidenced by the New Testament Books of Acts and letters and on into current times. An example is the missionary & evangelism conference from which I have just returned. Spreading salt for optimum effect is important.

Other major purposes of salt are de-icing slippery paths, extinguishing grease fires, and cleaning. Though unclean practices of sin seek to destroy our lives, Jesus' love and forgiveness washes away our sin and saves us from eternal punishment. Good news is in John 3:16: God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him might not perish, but have eternal life. We are washed clean and made righteous in Christ. We are salt.

By the stripes of Jesus we are healed, according to Isaiah. Healing is another use of salt. Thru Christ we are saved. We gain salvation. Thru our relationship with Jesus, "we are the salt of the earth."

To summarize, like salt, we are instruments of preserving & spreading the faith, proclaiming the good news of forgiveness of sin and salvation, and offering healing to this broken world. We are the salt of the earth. Let us not lose our saltiness. Let us be "salty," in the manner that Christ intends. Let news about Jesus spread through us to the ends of the earth. Amen!