

Sermon 2010 Pentecost 15
Text: Deuteronomy 30:15-20
Theme: "Salty Christians Wanted"
9-5-10

A lot of Christians are pansies today. God never once said that life was supposed to be an extended trip to Disney World. Nor did he say that Christians were supposed to act like a combination of Mr. Rogers and Captain Kangaroo. Where do we get this myth that Jesus was a wimpy, soft spoken man who would never cause a ruckus or raise his voice? Not from the Bible, that's for sure.

Somehow we have confused being loving, caring Christians with being pansies. Parents struggle with this constantly. How do you love your kids and yet be honest with them about choices that are wrong? Bosses struggle with wanting to be liked by their employees but, yet having to remain demanding in order to get a high-quality product delivered to consumers. On the one hand we are called to love others but on the other hand we are called to proclaim the truth.

Through Moses, God puts it to us in terms of curses and blessing. Curses come on paths that lead us away from God and

blessings come on paths that lead us towards God. I laugh at people who agonize over making the "right" choice about something. Kids agonize over going to the "right" school. Seniors agonize over picking the "right" time to move into an assisted living facility. Families look back over their lives and blame one another for making the wrong choice and the wrong time and that is why things are all going sideways now. The reality is that IT DOES NOT MATTER. God is bigger than any choice we ever make and His will in our lives will be done.

You are going to endure garbage in this life because this world is a broken place and it does not matter what path you choose. There is garbage on EVERY path and if you don't see the garbage in another person's life, it is just because you don't know him well enough, not because it is not there. Every path has garbage, but not every path has blessings.

God's promise is that if you walk down one of his paths, there will be blessings. He makes no promises about there being no garbage. But what are those blessings? Fabulous health and shiny new cars? A perfect relationship and smart, beautiful

children? NO. Look at what Jesus says in the Gospel. The blessing is salt. When you walk on God's paths, you get salty.

What was the purpose of salt in Jesus' day? Primarily it was not a seasoning but a preservative. Salt preserved fish and allowed people to eat longer. So the blessings of God are not something he does for us but something we become because of our proximity to him.

Slice up some potatoes and lay them on a plate of salt. Come back in a few hours and taste those potatoes and see how salty they have become just by being next to the salt. So God promises Israel that if they walk with him they will remain in his blessings – salty – preserved from all the powers of Hell – preserved from fear – preserved from enslavement. Walk on your own path and sooner or later you lose your saltiness and you become a bland person who has no defenses against the charms of Satan.

Now there are some truths that accompany being salt. First, the longer you walk with God, the saltier you get. The saltier you get the easier it becomes to speak the truth and live the truth.

Worldly things become less and less important to you and worldly choices become easier and easier to avoid. That's what Jesus means by all that hate talk. He is not advocating hating your family, but he is saying that the saltier you are the more important he becomes for you and the less important every other relationship becomes. There is a time in our lives when we are willing to become whatever people want us to become, but the stronger our faith grows the more salty we become and the less we are likely to change ourselves for the convenience of another.

Second, Jesus is saying here that walking with him is progressive as well. We grow from being his passing acquaintance, to being more and more like him. So many of the things he says that sound prescriptive are really descriptive. You are not commanded to hate people but because of your saltiness you will grow to hate anyone and anything that interferes with your relationship with Christ. Conversely, no one can jump steps in the relationship so it is good for us to be very patient with people as they make their own personal journeys. If you don't understand fractions, you cannot do well in algebra. You have to

have one before the other. Likewise with Christ, people all progress at their own paces and grow sometimes quickly and sometimes more slowly than we might like. But they have to progress in order through the steps in which God is leading them. We have no right to judge their journeys. Not everyone finds fractions easy and if you did, there was something else that threw a monkey wrench in your gears, like Language Arts or Geometry.

Our job is not to force people to be as salty as we are. Our job is not beat people into being salty. We just have to keep ourselves salty and then be present. The presence of salt spreads saltiness. Too often we try to decide the politically correct thing to say or we try to avoid making anyone feel bad about their choices or their opinions. But salt does what salt does. We can couch it as lovingly and non-judgmentally as possible, but in the end, if we are salty, we will salt others and that is good but sometimes it is offensive to them. In parenting, loving, salty presence is more important than anything you do or say. In marriage, loving, salty presence says more than a 2 karat diamond. At work, loving, salty presence speaks volumes

to coworkers and employees regardless of whether or not you can solve their problems. But in every case, loving salty presence annoys and offends those who are trying to walk down ungodly paths.

So, be salt. Receive God's Word and Sacrament as often as possible for that is how you are made saltier and then be present in the world. Don't be afraid to be who you are. Our job is not to try to make dirt salty but rather to just be salt. Our saltiness will flavor the world around us because that is what salt does. AMEN.