

## ***Saltiness* – Mark 9:38-50**

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**September 29, 2024**

This gospel reading is a continuation from last week's, where Jesus took a little child in his arms and said to his disciples, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

Children are synonymous with Jesus, just like Jesus is synonymous with his heavenly Father.

This week, the reading continues, and we can imagine that Jesus is still holding this same child in his lap when John the disciple presses him about an exorcist who was casting out demons in his name.

"We tried to stop him," John said, "because he was not following us." Jesus takes issue with their approach. "No, don't stop him," Jesus warns, "for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me."

Jesus was affirming the willingness and ability of somebody to do something of power and effectiveness in his name, such as exorcising a demon or giving a cup of cold water to the thirsty.

And then, after a warning to anybody who would cause another, including the child presumably sitting on his lap, to sin, Jesus says, "For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

There's another gospel text where Jesus references salt. It's Matthew 5:13, in which Jesus says, "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is

no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet".

Salt can lose its saltiness, including that which applies to our faith.

You can probably remember a time where your faith was really salty — full of zest and energy that was applied with ease and a vigor that reflected your passion for Jesus and his transforming grace.

Maybe that's how you would describe your faith today. If that's true for you, sit in this moment and appreciate the way in which God has spoken to you and moved you to be salted with fire.

We can appreciate when any of us is salted with fire, or in the groove, so to speak. Things are just going well. Everything has come together to make for a moment in time when you're just in synch with God. There are just those moments when, for whatever reason, our faith is concrete and we're doing all we need to do in response to that elevated sense of connection.

And then there are also those moments when we're sort of stuck in neutral. The belief is there but the passion is not. And it's often just a matter of needing some sort of kick start, some launching point, to match our energy with our faith.

Today is your lucky day. Because I'm going to give you some ideas as to how, within the context of our ministry, you could increase your saltiness, actions you could take that might season your salt. And, it would also have the effect of increasing our church's ministry.

Our children and youth program is being renewed. We're blessed to be able to have a small nucleus of youngsters learning of God's love for them here on Sundays and for special events.

And we're blessed, of course, to have their parents involved as well.

But we need more adult volunteers to make our programs go, to keep the momentum going. And here's what we need help with:

We need volunteers to sit in support of our Sunday morning KidsZone. Whether it's leading a lesson or simply being an adult presence in the room, we need more adults to lighten the load on our current leaders and provide the adequate supervision needed for the kids. You may have the gifts for that, gifts that could help our youngest disciples find their home here. And at the same time, in your exposure to them and their families...you'll find your saltiness increasing.

In addition to our Sunday morning KidsZone, our Christian Education team enjoys putting on special events for our kids. In about a month, it will be our annual Trunk or Treat event. And, we need volunteers for that—to decorate, to serve snacks, or to decorate your own trunks and hand out candy, or to tear down the decorations when it's over. Our kids and families will benefit. And...in the connections you make with others joining in that work, you'll find your saltiness increasing.

In December, our kids will be putting on their annual Christmas program during worship. And of course, the kids need caring adults to help them get in the right places, get their costumes on, and get snacks. The preparation will go much smoother and be a greater joy to all with more adults involved in that preparation.

And if you sign up to help with that...you'll find your saltiness increasing.

We need assistance, too, in areas outside of children and youth programming. Consider these opportunities:

Next week, we will have our annual tailgate luncheon. It's always a wonderful event and the Church Life Committee does a great job making that event happen. But again, we need more hands to set up for that event and to clean up after the event. If you're able to do that, the workload on everybody would be reduced.

And, in the process of making more connections with other servants, you'll find your saltiness increasing.

In November, our annual stewardship and thanksgiving dinner will be held. Again, it's another great fellowship event that we have. But it takes volunteers to organize it, to set it up, and to clean up. And if you'll agree to help make the event happen, the blessing of that meal will be felt...and you'll find your saltiness increasing.

In December, our annual Service of Lessons and Carols will take place, followed by a great reception that was a hit last year. Again though, it takes volunteers to prepare the menu, set up the food, and clean up afterward. You can help make it a blessing by agreeing to serve. And if so, Advent and the Christmas season will be another big blessing for us as a church family, and...you may find your saltiness increasing.

I've also gotten feedback recently about interest in providing more programming for adults, including midday events for those who prefer not to be out at night. And that sets up well for book studies or midday lunch and learns that we might hold to bring folks together in fellowship and study.

I'm happy to take the lead in organizing such events, but we'd love to have some volunteer help to run with ideas, settle on

programs, and organize logistics. These would be great service and community-building events. And if you act to help make them happen, you might find our saltiness increasing.

Our Church Life Committee is bringing back our shepherd groups. The church family will be divided into smaller groups of family units and will be looked after by shepherds—people who would be willing to make simple connections with folks in the church to make sure they stay connected to us and are cared for.

And we need these shepherds to use their talents and skills for this task. It would be a gift to the church if you accepted this opportunity. And in doing so, you might find your saltiness increasing.

Also, let me make a public service announcement for something you can do outside the church to increase your saltiness. I'm a regular blood donor through Medic Regional Blood Center. And there's a shortage of blood these days, particularly type O blood. It's a simple way to give life. It takes about a half hour beginning to end. Plus, they give you snacks at the end and usually a free t-shirt and coupons to restaurants.

And in that simple act of giving blood, I think you can also find your saltiness increasing.

If you feel compelled to answer the call to serve in any of these capacities, I'd be happy to point you in the direction of the people who will get you more involved. And I'll make an assumption that you will find it a blessing, along with the gift you'll be giving to others.

Jesus said, "Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another." Sometimes, when we go out to our cars and discover our car batteries are dead, they re-charge themselves after they've been jump started. The same is true with our faith.

When we find it dead, or lacking saltiness, a jump start through some sort of action can lead to a lasting charge that gives us more energy and draws us more in synch with God.

I wish that for all of us. And it takes, most times, just some simple actions that can launch us on our way.