

Scripture and Sermon for Sunday, September 27, 2015

Esther 7:1-6, 9-10; 9:20-22

So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. On the second day, as they were drinking wine, the king again said to Esther, "What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled." Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have won your favor, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me — that is my petition — and the lives of my people — that is my request. For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have held my peace; but no enemy can compensate for this damage to the king." Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, who has presumed to do this?" Esther said, "A foe and enemy, this wicked Haman!" Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen.

Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, "Look, the very gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, stands at Haman's house, fifty cubits high." And the king said, "Hang him on that." So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the anger of the king abated.

Mordecai recorded these things, and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, enjoining them that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar and also the fifteenth day of the same month, year by year, as the days on which the Jews gained relief from their enemies, and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and presents to the poor.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Mark 9:38-50

John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." But Jesus said, "Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterwards to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us. For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.

"If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

"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."

Let us pray....Amen.

At the end of today's Gospel passage, Jesus has some words for the disciples, and of course, for us: "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."

This is a brilliant metaphor for those who were right there listening to Jesus teach, and it is no less a brilliant metaphor for those of us who are listening today!

In those days, salt was a valuable and life sustaining substance. The disciples would have understood immediately what Jesus was saying when they heard him say 'have salt in yourselves'. It is a little less clear today what that might mean, and so I've worked up a modern list of ways that we might have salt in ourselves, metaphorically speaking, of course! If we apply the metaphor towards our relationships with others, even those who believe differently than we do, we will surely be on the path Jesus encourages us to follow.

Uses for Salt:

Flavor enhancer

Ice melter

Insulator

Yeast inhibitor

Cleanser

Paving material

Food preserver

Odor remover

Stain fighter

Color brightener

Fire extinguisher

Weed inhibitor

Medicinal: Bee sting/ Sore throat reliever

The right amount of salt keeps our heart beating properly

So how many of you remember any of your High School Chemistry, or happened to study chemistry in college? Salt, that wonderful substance that does so many things, is known to us as the chemical compound of sodium and chlorine, or sodium chloride. It turns out that the bond between these two compounds is impossible to break. Once sodium and chlorine become bonded, once the compound sodium chloride is made, it is impossible to break apart.

Neither heat, nor pressure can break the bond. Once salt is created, it is always salt. And any chemist will tell us that since that bond can't be broken, salt cannot be anything else but salt. Salt cannot lose its saltiness.

Well, that's not exactly true. There is one way salt can lose its saltiness. There is one way we can make salt stop being salty. Anyone care to guess how we might do that?

Dilution! We can take a measure of salt, and mix it with enough water to make the saltiness disappear. It might take 2 gallons of water to dilute a cup of salt, to dilute it enough that we can't taste the salt anymore, but it can be done.

Followers of Jesus, people of the Gospel, are salted with fire. That salt is good. But if our saltiness is diluted to the point that we are no longer salty, how can we get our saltiness back?

If being salted with fire is a metaphor for our faith in the gospel, then losing our saltiness is a metaphor for the dilution of our faith.

Which leads me to a whole list of things that might dilute, even dissolve our faith:

Addiction, idolatry, anger, prejudice, privilege, the stressors of our lives, and the ways we choose to release them...the list is very long, and unique to each of us, as we each

have different things in our lives that could potentially dilute or dissolve our faith. If we are the salt of the earth, then the world has an unlimited number of ways to dissolve our faith. We can lose our saltiness if we aren't careful.

Without a certain amount of self-awareness, our very faith can begin to dissolve, and before you know it, we're not salty any more. Not useful anymore.

Can you gauge your saltiness, the strength of your faith today? Are you really salty? Mostly salty? Not salty at all? Because Jesus wants us as salty as we can be. To have salt in each other, to support each other's saltiness, and have peace with each other.

We don't lose our saltiness when things get hot, or when we're under pressure. No, we lost our saltiness when we dilute our faith to the point where salt can no longer be detected.

We *can* re-season ourselves, and each other, by reclaiming our faith, by acting on our faith, and by recognizing the things we bring into our lives that dilute our faith.

Salt is not only a useful element in our lives, it is a crucial and necessary element in order for us to *stay* alive. It's in our very blood and tissues, and as we heard in our Holy Scriptures today, it's in our very souls.

The level of saltiness in us is never the same, never constant: it's always fluctuating based on our life situations. Can you think of a time when you were full of salt? How about when your salt levels were dangerously low? What was going on in your life at those times?

Today's lesson from Mark has Jesus speaking to the disciples, but also to us: : "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."

Fellowship and care for each other is having salt in ourselves. Accepting each other just as God made us is being at peace with one another. We don't have to let the world and worldly things dilute our saltiness. We can maintain a high level of salt in our lives and in our spirits by acting on our faith, by living out our faith in our families, in our community, in our church family, and in the world.

Let's try and be as salty as we can be. Let's try and have salt in each other. After all, we're right next to the Salt City, there's plenty of salt to go around! Amen.

