

Salt: For the life of the world.

Matthew 5:13-16

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Introduction:

Salt: For the life of the world.

Allow me today to work with a modern-day parable and a metaphor.

First a parable:

There was once a town high in the Alps that straddled the banks of a beautiful stream. The stream was fed by springs that were old as the earth and deep as the sea.

The water was clear like crystal. Children laughed and played beside it; swans and geese swam in it. You could see rocks and sand and rainbow trout that swarmed at the bottom of the stream.

High in the hills, far beyond anyone's sight, lived an old woman who served as Keeper of the Springs. She had been hired so long ago that now no one could remember a time when she wasn't there. She would travel from one spring to another in the hills, removing branches or fallen leaves or debris that might pollute the water. But her work was unseen.

One year the town council decided they had better things to do with their money. No one supervised the old woman anyway. They had roads to repair and taxes to collect and services to offer and giving money to an unseen stream cleaner had become a luxury they could no longer afford.

So, the old woman left her post. High in the mountains, the springs went untended; twigs and branches muddied the liquid flow. Mud and silt compacted the creek bed; farm wastes turned parts of the stream into stagnant bogs.

For a time, no one in the village noticed. But after a while, the water was not the same. It began to look brackish. The swans flew away to live elsewhere. The water no longer had a crisp scent that drew children to play by it. Some people of the town began to grow ill. All noticed the loss of sparkling beauty that used to flow between the banks of the streams that fed the town.

The life of the village depended on the stream, and the life of the stream, on the keeper.

And Jesus said to his disciples...

13 "You are the salt of the earth.

A parable and a metaphor.

Like the keeper of the spring that flowed into the Alpine town, salt is a seasoning that draws little attention to itself.

But its absence is noticed indeed.
Please pass the salt!
And not to mention its potency...
Gasp - how much salt did you put in here?

Salt when used well, is a seasoning that exists not to be tasted, but to enhance the surrounding flavours for everyone's enJOYment.

What a beautiful metaphor of how Christ qualities can intermingle with our society for its health and wellbeing.

Qualities of humility, poverty of spirit, gentleness, a deep longing for more Spirit, kindness, and mercy. (Beatitudes).

Somehow, mysteriously, these qualities keep the stream of life flowing.
And salt the earth.

- Following Christ is thus not so much a privilege as it is a responsibility.

“You are the salt of the earth”, said Jesus.

But it is an intricate task - too much and we destroy, too little and it is bland.

Christians historically have struggled to attend to the intricacy of the task...

There were centuries of destructive potency... over-salting...

- those first few centuries when we disrespected our Jewish and Muslim neighbors who share so much of our Scriptures.
 - We sacrificed relationship for being right.
 - When robust, living faith does not feel threatened by dissolution in the face of multiple possibilities.

(See: Catherine Keller on Process Theology)

- And then we got caught up in the arrogance of Christendom - colonizing the world in the name of Christ.
 - we misrepresented Jesus who had modeled self-emptying.
 - We provided our answers without taking the time to listen.

But there have also been bland times... where salt has lost its saltiness...

- We accommodated other spiritual paths... and lost our Christian identity...
- Tolerance moved pluralism into relativism
- We performed acts of justice with no mention of the Christ for whom this is central

- We promoted Christ with no compassion and action to assist the ones to whom we spoke
- And we spoke of heaven as a distant reality and ignored (even violated) the earth.

Salt lost its savor.

“You are salt of the earth”, said Jesus.

But friends, I confess: I am at a loss...

I don't know how to attend to this intricate task of finding a delicate balance.

Sprinkling just enough into my conversations, meetings, friendships in my various life contexts.

Being salt is a relational task. Not an over-assuming monologue, not a withdrawing - but an intricate interconnecting.

So... I Invite a friend into my home. We enjoy a meal, break bread together. And she comments on the books on my book shelf.

I am a Christian, I say with much trepidation and a good deal of embarrassment... and immediately I feel the need to qualify.

But...I am not like that... or like this...

For I know that I have 2000 plus years of history to contend with.

One blogger I follow, wrote:

“I refuse to be a Christian who demands that others believe what I believe or live as I live or profess what I profess.

I refuse to be a Christian who believes that God blesses North America more than God so loves the world.

I refuse to be a Christian who uses the Bible to perpetuate individual or systemic bigotry, racism, or sexism.

I refuse to be a Christian who is reluctant to call-out the words of hateful preachers, venomous politicians, and mean-spirited pew sitters, in the name of keeping Christian unity.

I refuse to be a Christian who tolerates a global Church where all people are not openly welcomed, fully celebrated, and equally cared for.

I refuse to be a Christian who is generous with judgement and stingy with Grace.

I refuse to be a Christian who can't see the image of God in people of every color, every religious tradition, every sexual orientation.

I refuse to be a Christian devoid of the character of Jesus; his humility, his compassion, his smallness, his gentleness with people's wounds, his attention to the poor and the forgotten and the marginalized, his intolerance for religious hypocrisy, his clear expression of the love of God"

"You are the salt of the earth", said Jesus.

But how? I ask

How do I, we, attend to this intricate task of finding a delicate balance?
Of actions and words.

And Why? And what motivates me?

- Surely not to fill our churches, meet our budgets, or return to the hey day of Christendom.
- No friends, in this emerging church era - we will be a small group of people where the church is not the goal but the instrument.
- And on what grounds have we to think that Christianity will offer humankind what it needs?

**These are the questions I live into when I hear the words of Jesus:
"You are the salt of the earth"**

But I am also committed to a person. The person of Jesus.

- I believe in the mystery that the world is saved by those it persecutes.

And when I read the gospels or when I am in the presence of Christ qualities:

- Qualities of humility, poverty of spirit, gentleness, kindness, and mercy.

My heart sings.

My life stream flows, again.

And so I choose, however imperfectly to heed Christ's words and salt the earth.

What a wonder when we recognize this quality in others.

Alice, come and share with us your experience of Christ in another.