

The Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost

October 7, 2012

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

Mark 9:42-50

“And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where “‘their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.’ Everyone will be salted with fire. “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other.”

“Yuck!” Let me tell you about a time I had this reaction to eating something that wasn’t even a vegetable. I enjoy peanuts as a nice snack once in a while. One time Lisa had just picked up a brand new jar of peanuts at the store. So I opened them up, took a few in my hand, and started to eat them when I noticed something was different. In fact I spit them out saying: “Yuck!” Those peanuts were gross. They didn’t taste like any peanuts I was used to so I looked at the jar and saw the problem. There on the jar was the word – unsalted. It is hard to believe salt makes that much of a difference. Perhaps some of you like unsalted peanuts and I’m sorry but I don’t understand why. There is no taste to them. Lisa agreed and I think we eventually ended up tossing that jar away. To us peanuts without any salt are no good at all.

Today, for another reason we hear that salt is good. We do not want to lose our saltiness. For then we will be in danger of having God spit us out of His mouth. We will be no good to anyone. As we listen to God’s Word this morning we will consider what it means to be: **Salty Christians.**

Jesus is telling us something important as He uses this picture of us as salty Christians. What is Jesus talking about? He says: **“Everyone will be salted with fire. “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other.”** First of all we probably need a new perspective on salt to understand this – in Jesus day it did so much more than cause high blood pressure. Today, we find salt among the spices at the grocery store and it is about the cheapest thing you can buy there. But in Bible times it wasn’t like that; salt was valuable. So much so that soldiers in the Roman army were paid part of their wages in salt. In fact the Latin word for salt is *sal*, which is why we call our wages today a salary. Jesus says: **“Salt is good.”**

And salt wasn’t just good for making food taste better. It was used to preserve food which was critical in pre-refrigeration days. For example as Lewis and Clark made their way down the Columbia River they realized they were in great danger for they were running out of salt. Without salt, their health and life was at risk. This was one of the reasons Clark exclaimed, *“Ocean in view! Oh, the joy!”* They spent much of their time

on the Pacific coast that winter boiling seawater to make salt. Another use of salt was it was good for sacrifice. Old Testament sacrifices were salted before being offered to God. Salt was used to purify the sacrifice and make it acceptable.

And perhaps Jesus had all these things in mind when He tells us that salt is good. Perhaps Jesus has all these things in mind as He gets us to consider what becomes of salt when it loses its saltiness – it is worthless. For sure Jesus has us in mind when He reminds us everyone will be salted with fire and tells us to have salt in ourselves. We will all be tested. Jesus wants us to be salty Christians. In other words Jesus is concerned about our faith. He wants us to stand firm. He wants our lives and actions to reflect the faith that is in us. Jesus wants us to let His Word dwell in us richly. He wants us to gladly hear the word of God and obey it. He wants the message of His grace, that we are forgiven and redeemed children of God, to move us to live at peace with one another.

I don't know many other portions of Scripture which speak so strongly about just how much Jesus is concerned about faith in Him. ***“And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck.”*** Again, did I mention I do not know many other places in the Bible where it is stated so strongly how much Jesus is concerned about our faith? Jesus' concern is first of all about the damage we might do to the faith of others. He does not want us to cause little ones – either in age or in respect to being new in faith – to sin. There is no missing the point here. It would be better for us to drown in the sea with a big rock (which they used to turn donkeys with) tied around our neck rather than for us to cause a little one to fall from faith. It would be better that we die and not be around at all than to live and cause someone to be led away from Jesus. Does this not make us pause to consider our actions and watch our life closely?

Jesus is also concerned about our own faith in Him. ***“If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where “their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.”*** Again you won't miss the point here! It would be better for us to lose our eyes or feet or hands, to be completely crippled in life, than to have our faith crippled to the point where we miss out on eternal life. Sin is serious. It is far worse than just “yuck!” It leads to hell. Jesus is not kidding when He tells us it would be better to have your eyes poked out and your limbs torn off than to end up in hell. Hell is real and hell is awful. Hell is also something that is too often dismissed and ignored. Two soldiers at war got into a discussion about the subject of hell one time and asked the chaplain there: *“Do you believe in hell?”* The chaplain to their surprise answered, *“No.”* The soldiers told him frankly that he should then quit his job as chaplain. When the chaplain asked why they responded: *“If there is no hell, we do not need you, and if there is a hell, we do not wish to be lead astray.”* Jesus reminds us that hell is very real and is a place of eternal suffering and torment.

But Jesus and the heaven He won for us is also real. The Jesus is our Savior is real and true and wonderful. The truth is Jesus saved us from hell – with a perfect life, with sufferings on a cross which we deserved – with a death which we had earned – and

with a resurrection that results in blessings for us without end. As Jesus stands victorious over the grave He reminds us hell has been vanquished! By grace through faith in Jesus that victory is ours. So now the question becomes what is more valuable than faith – the faith of those around us – the faith the Holy Spirit has worked in each of our hearts? Do we understand why Jesus is so serious with these words? What kind of priority does feeding our faith on God's Word get on a weekly or daily basis?

Unlike salt today where too much may be bad for us – salt is good when it comes to God's Word. We can never have too much. We can never hear the good news about our Savior too often. We can never overeat on the banquet of His grace. We never, ever, ever want to lose our saltiness. For Jesus has made us the salt of the earth. Jesus gives us peace with God so we are able to live at peace with one another. Jesus takes our sins away so that we are able to use our hands and eyes and our feet to serve Him and our neighbor. That's what it is to be salty Christians – to have faith in Jesus which shows itself in love. Amen.