

**Sermon**  
**St. Mary's Nanoose**  
**February 5, 2017**  
**Matt 5:13-20**

True confessions..... I am a salt-a-holic. I love salt. And I've loved it ever since I was a small child. No one else in my family loved or even particularly liked salt like I did. Unless it was in the form of the salty licorice Dutch people think is a treat. Then pretty much my whole family can eat enough to make their veins pinch and hearts pound.

In today's reading, Jesus says "You are the salt of the earth," and with those words we are given a rich image to unpack and explore.

What does it mean to be salt?

Wars have been fought over salt. Salt was, and is, essential to our well-being.

In Jesus' day, salt was valued in much the same way as gold. Roman soldiers were paid in salt which is where the expression "worth his salt" comes from. The word "salary" derives from the Latin word for salt. To be salt, then, is to be valued. Jesus tells us "we ARE salt," so we know that we are loved and blessed; not for what we will become or what we've done, but because we simply are. As salt is part of God's creation, so are we. As salt has a purpose, so do we. We are essential to God's plan.

There are many other images and uses for salt. In the ancient world, salt was key to preserving food. In the right proportion, salt draws out the flavor while cooking.

To be salt, then, is to contribute flavor to what is shared. It is to preserve what is good. In today's reading we hear that we are to follow the law, yes, but we are to do more than that. We are to enter fully in to relationship – with God and with each other; allowing our hearts to be transformed and to share the love that is ours.

When we are salt, we offer our gifts thoughtfully and at the right time. Salt is no good on its own; it needs to be shared, added, used. We are salt for the good of God's world; not for our own needs alone, but for the good of our community.

Salt also draws out infection. As salt, we can gently draw out that which is not healthy and right in each other and bring it into the light for healing. Salt is essential on a hot summer's day. Does anyone else remember being given salt tablets at summer camp?

In ancient times people broke bread and shared salt together as a sign of friendship and peace. In Leviticus, salt is mentioned in the covenant relationship with God.

Our sweat and tears are salty. And so we share our labour and grief with God. Salt, again, is part of our covenant relationship with God.

Too much of a good thing is not a good thing! Too much salt will ruin any meal, sting a cut or destroy a field.

Like anything, salt needs to be used differently in different situations in order to be effective.

In the first verse from today's reading we hear "If salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for

anything..."(Matt 5:13). What can this mean? Could it mean that if we as individuals and as Christians deny our uniqueness and don't speak out against injustice, well, then, maybe we're just as banal as any other person who is trying to fit in and avoid difficult truths and challenging situations. We are tasteless and useless. This seems a bit harsh.

But in the last verse of this reading, we learn that our challenge is to be more than the pious and observant scribes and Pharisees. We are to move beyond concern for ourselves and for the law to join God in the reconciling of the world in love. This is no small feat. We are *not* called to be safe, discrete, to fit in at all costs.

No, we reminded that we ARE salt of the earth and light of the world. Each one of us. Each one of us is called to the sacred duty of letting our light shine and to share our unique gifts. No, more to the point, we are to let GOD'S light shine through us so God can fulfill God's plan. We are called, not as a demand, but to fully express ourselves as a people who have been given God's favour; people who are loved, valued, blessed and created to share all that has been given them.

Last year I bunked in with a friend in residence at the Vancouver School of Theology. This friend was an excellent cook and spoiled me with her culinary skills. I was most appreciative. But one night, out of the blue, she snapped at me when for the umpteenth time, I sprinkled salt liberally over her creation. "That's enough!" she barked. I was stunned. This was our first and only fight. She

apologized, “I’m sorry, your salt consumption really isn’t my business,” she said. And I replied, “Not to worry – I hear your concern for my well being.” Salt became the topic of our conversation for the rest of the meal. I told her how I’ve had low blood pressure all my life and somehow even as a little child I intuited that salt would help raise my energy level. And it did.

But because of our conversation, the thought occurred to me that maybe I *was* overdoing it. And then for some reason, about 2 months ago, I stopped putting salt on my food. I just knew in my bones that I was getting enough in the food itself. No need to add more. I have changed. And my need for salt has changed. (But watch out if someone puts out salty ripple chips – I’m a goner!)

*You* are the salt of the earth. *You* are unique. *You* are perfect as you are. You are blessed. You are valued. You are God’s own and called to let that truth known and your sacred duty is to make sure that every person on earth is treated as blessed, valued and loved. This is our call as Christians. This is our invitation and response to love.

And so this morning, as we approach the table where God shares God’s self with us in the ultimate act of self-giving, let us receive this awesome gift of love, and let ourselves be the salt and light that we were created to be.

Amen.