

"How Will We Stay Salty?"

How will we stay salty? Friends – in person and at a physical distance, the Spirit of God (that is, fathomless Love) has gathered us together on this Labor Day weekend and thirteenth of twenty-four Sundays in the long, green, growing season of Ordinary Time in the circle of our church year.

As we enter now into an extended moment of reflection, let's each wonder: how will I stay salty? Let us pray. Spirit of God within each of us and connecting us as community, we long to sense your movement among us this morning. Empower us - with serenity to accept the things that are not within our power to change, with courage to change the things we can, and with wisdom to discern the one from the other. Amen.

Moments ago, we heard Jesus' words: "*Salt is useful, but if it loses its taste, how can it be resalted again?*" (Lk 14:34) Another translation reads this way: "*Salt is good; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored?*" What was this saltiness Jesus referred to?

Let's imagine ourselves as ones within the large crowd gathered on a hillside. You dropped your work to go listen to him when he paused in your town yesterday. Today, you've left your work behind to follow Jesus and listen to him speak in the next town. On one hand, the teachings of this rabbi are not new. You've recited the same scriptures within your family and heard them explained by rabbis throughout your life. But there is something different about the way Jesus teaches the old, old stories. Earlier in the day, Jesus told a parable about a man throwing a party. We've always spoken about the importance of showing hospitality to strangers as part of following Torah. But Jesus really made the principle come to life when he described all of the party invitees making excuses and the host decisively pivoting to invite strangers, marginalized people, and others with whom he didn't usually associate and whose company would push him outside his comfort zone.

This Jesus is powerful – he adds zesty, relatable insight to the reading of Scriptures! My neighbor also dropped her chores today to come listen to Jesus. She and I have compared notes; we’re still scratching our heads over that bit Jesus said about salt: “*Salt is useful, but if it loses its taste, how can it be resalted again?*” There was passion in his eyes and in his voice. His tone was challenging yet welcoming. These odd words came on the heels of challenging us to follow him. I dropped my work yesterday to listen to him in my town. I even followed him here today. But I intend to go back to my work and family tomorrow when Jesus moves on to another town.

Jesus told us that choosing to follow him is a deliberate decision. He compared it to someone planning to build a tower or to go to war. Jesus said we need to calculate the costs and be willing to leave all else behind in order to follow him. He even said we can’t be his disciples unless we leave behind all of our possessions. I wish there were an easier way, because I’m not sure I’m ready for such a big commitment.

Maybe I do know what the saltiness is – I think Jesus wants my life to be preserved and seasoned by true devotion to the way of Love. I think I was salty when I was younger, but I wonder if I’ve lost some of my saltiness. Is it possible to be resalted? How can I stay salty? Maybe my work can wait long enough for me to follow and listen to Jesus for one more day.

Fellow twenty-first disciples of Jesus, can we imagine what it would have been like to be then and there on the hillside with Jesus? To directly witness the ways Jesus spoke, looked at people, gesticulated, and moved in the world? While we weren’t there on that day, how might we be touched by this gospel question today? “*But if salt loses its taste, how can it be resalted again?*” In order to fully follow the way of God’s love, what would you need to let go of (even if not all your possessions and family) and what would you need to commit to (even if not following Jesus as your sole livelihood)?

In the reading from Deuteronomy, we heard, “*But if your hearts stray and you do not listen to me, if you let yourself be drawn into the worship of other gods, and serve them, I tell you today, you will not survive... Choose life, then, so that you and your descendants may live, by loving your God, by obeying God’s voice and by clinging to God.*” (Deut. 30: 17-18a, 19b-20a)

How will we choose life in ways that guide our hearts – so that they don’t stray after false, empty gods but rather stay immersed in a loving marinade such that our movements in the world are flavored with salty Love?

My call to ministry began in a salty way at a nursing home in my hometown of Eagle River, WI, when I was 8 years old. My mother, a guardian *ad litem*, asked the program director of the nursing home to pair me with a community member as a reading partner. I was painfully shy in those years but game for trying out visits with an older person. To our surprise, they instead determined that I could fill a niche as entertainment in the community room every Wednesday before the dinner hour. So I read poems, accompanied sing-alongs, and chatted with residents over jigsaw puzzles for six years of Wednesday evenings. This was a foundational and formational experience in my life. The people of the community welcomed me – a stranger – into their home. We shared smiles and laughter. I heard their stories. I witnessed some of their pain, fear and love. They witnessed some of mine. My elders welcomed me. They were salty! And they helped me recognize my own saltiness.

“*Choose life,*” God said to the people. How might you choose life in a new way as we enter the season of autumn 2022? How might you open yourself to new experiences that could remind you of your saltiness and show you the saltiness of your neighbor?

If you long to feel more meaningfully connected within our congregation – participating in ways that are life-affirming for you and others, I invite you to reach out to me or a church friend so that we can explore together.

Participating on our Harvest Fest planning team, meeting again on Tuesday to refine plans for this vital annual event during which we open our doors wide to the greater community might be a way to choose life and remember your saltiness.

Singing in our choir, rebooting for the fall next week on Connection Sunday, might be a way to choose life and remember your saltiness.

Attending our next joint church potluck at Sharri's home with our neighbors from St. Peter's UCC might be a way to choose life and remember your saltiness.

Baking treats or being present at our refreshment stand and blessing of animals during Derby Days might be a way to choose life and remember your saltiness.

Getting your hands dirty at our tree planting day here at People's Park might be a way to choose life and remember your saltiness.

Participating with People's Book Club in our reading and discussion of *The Flag + The Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy* might be a way to choose life and remember your saltiness.

I would like to close by inviting you to recall last Sunday, when our children gathered on our Chancel steps and we blessed their backpacks & diaper bags, which carry tools to support their saltiness – their learning and growth in the coming year. I witness our children interacting with the love in this congregation – the love that you embody to and with them. I particularly hear feedback about our children enjoying Children's Activity on Sundays. How significant, how life-choosing and how salty might it be for you to try serving as a Children's Activity assistant once every 4-6 weeks. "Count the costs," Jesus said (Lk 14:33). You may feel nervous, not knowing if you'll think of a helpful response if a child asks you something. You may worry that you wouldn't feel skilled or useful enough by providing companioning presence and vital support to our wonderfully skilled leaders, Claire and Carol.

And yet... you would model for our children a deliberate choice to give of your time and energy to engage with them over and above the gift of being present with them here at worship. Assisting with Children's Activity might be a way for you to choose life and remember your saltiness. Carol needs an assistant for next Sunday. Might you be the first to sign up to assist them this fall?

We take great comfort in knowing that a God more wonderful than we can imagine and yet also located within each of us and at the intersections among us knows each of us more profoundly than we know ourselves. We all want to be known. God can speak love through each of us – child, youth, young adult, middler adult, and elder adult – as we make efforts to be companions to one another as we journey in faith.

Let's actively choose life, counting the costs, staying salty as we recognize and affirm the saltiness in one another. Love is counting on us. Amen!

Rev. Clare Gromoll
People's Congregational Church (Bayport, MN)
September 4, 2022 (13th Sunday in Ordinary Time)
Deuteronomy 30: 15-20; Luke 14: 25-35