

A few years ago, there was a Mensa convention in San Francisco. **Mensa, of course, is an organization whose members have an IQ of 140 or higher.** Several of the Mensa members were lunching at a local cafe. While dining, they discovered that their saltshaker contained pepper and their pepper shaker was full of salt. The Mensa members, being naturally inquisitive, began to question how they could they swap the contents of the two bottles without spilling any of the contents, using only the implements at hand. After all, this was clearly a job for the best minds available.

The group debated and presented ideas, and finally came up with a brilliant solution involving a napkin, a straw, and an empty saucer. They called the waitress to their table—convinced that they would dazzle her with their solution.

“Ma’am,” they said, “We couldn’t help but notice that the pepper shaker contains salt and the saltshaker contains pepper. “Oh,” said the waitress when they finally got her attention. “Sorry about that.” Without further comment, she unscrewed the caps of both bottles, switched the caps, and then said, “Will that be one check or separate checks?”

**I guess the Mensa members learned something about the worth of common sense that day . . . from a café waitress. NOW, LET’S talk about saltshakers for a few moments today.**

Jesus described his followers as the **salt** of the earth in Matt. 5:13 as part of the Sermon on the Mount: *“You are the salt of the earth,” he said. “But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.”* In Matthew’s Gospel, these words follow the Beatitudes and are often interpreted as referring to Jesus’ expectations of his disciples.

Mark uses the same imagery in today’s lesson from Mark 9:50: *“Salt is good,” he said, “but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again?”*

Bible scholar William Barclay interpreted Jesus’ words like this: *“When a thing loses its essential quality and fails to perform its essential duty, it is fit for nothing but to be thrown away.”*

**In those days, salt was a really VALUABLE COMMODITY. Salt was valuable for (2) reasons: as a PRESERVATIVE FOR FOOD & to ENHANCE THE FLAVOR OF FOOD.** We all know how essential salt is for enhancing the taste of food. On some of our most popular foods, salt really brings out the flavor.

In 1853 George Crum, a chef in New York, accidentally invented a popular new dish. An annoying patron kept sending his French-fried potatoes back to the kitchen because they were soggy. In an attempt to teach the customer a lesson, Crum sliced the fries extra thin, fried them to a crisp and drowned them in salt. To his surprise, the complaining customer actually liked the converted fries **and thus, potato chips were born.**

What would potato chips taste like without salt? Or how about French fries, for that matter? Or popcorn? **Obviously, we can overindulge in salt, but few people voluntarily go on a completely salt-free diet.**

**When Christ said that we are the salt of the earth, perhaps he was saying that we should bring flavor to life as he brought flavor to life.**

Years ago, a woman named Marge wrote columnist Ann Landers with a complaint. In her letter, she said, “I’m 44, husband same age (swell guy). We get along O.K.—no drinking, no gambling, no skirt chasing. He has a good job and our home is paid for. Our children are healthy and normal. They do well in school and the three older ones (teenagers) have never caused us any trouble. **“So, why am I writing?”** she asks. **“Because my life is blah. Something is missing. It’s like stew without salt. I feel a certain emptiness.”**

Can anybody identify with her complaint? Many people in our society have that emptiness within their lives. Like this woman, their lives, are “blah.” Something is missing. As this woman described her life, “It’s like stew without salt.”

**How do WE BRING “FLAVOR” TO PEOPLE’S LIVES? We do it by showing them genuine concern.**

**We let them know that somebody cares for them.**

One Saturday in a small town in Michigan there was a 5K footrace. This footrace featured different age classes of runners. A nine-year-old boy in the race named Boden was showing signs of fatigue. Behind him a 19-year-old Marine, Lance Corporal Myles Kerr, noticed that Boden was struggling. Myles offered him some encouragement. **Boden looked up at Myles and asked, “Sir, will you please run with me?”**

As you know, Marines don’t leave their fallen buddies behind, even if they’re only 9-years-old and even if the Marine is carrying a full backpack. It took almost 36 minutes for Boden and Kyle to run that 5K race together. Their story was carried on the Facebook page, *Seal of Honor*, which added these words: **“By his unwavering commitment to help those in need through his ability to inspire others by his unequivocal level of motivation, Lance Corporal Myles Kerr reflected great credit upon himself and was keeping in the highest traditions of the United States Marine Corps.”**

I would like to think followers of Jesus Christ would be as kind and as helpful to anyone who was struggling as that Marine was. ***Any time we show genuine concern for someone else, we are making this world a better place. We are adding flavor to their lives. We are showing ourselves to be “salt of the earth.”***

Recently I heard about a woman named Martha who was fortunate enough to run into a group of women who would most certainly qualify as the salt of the earth. Martha is a twenty-six-year-old woman with ALS---Lou Gehrig’s disease. **Martha needed help.** When this group of women from Evanston, Illinois, heard about Martha, they jumped into action. They began giving Martha round-the-clock nursing care. They bathed her, fed her, prayed for her, and witnessed to her. Martha, who had not received Christ as her Savior, couldn’t understand how a loving God could let her get ALS. But when she saw God’s love in these women, eventually she became a follower of Jesus Christ.

Don’t you imagine there was rejoicing in heaven when these women jumped into action to help Martha? Jesus said to his followers that they were the salt of the earth. It was a high compliment. **We are to bring flavor to the lives of everyone around us by our genuine concern for others.**

**THAT IS THE 1<sup>ST</sup> THING “SALT” DOES.... “SALT” BRINGS “flavor to food.”**

**Traditionally, however, salt has played an even more important role in the lives of human beings. For many generations it was the only “REAL PRESERVATIVE” humanity had for food.** Indeed, before the modern miracle of refrigeration, people were quite limited in the foods they could enjoy because they were limited in preserving food—especially meat for later use.

In his book *Salt for Society*, author W. Phillip Keller recounts many of his experiences as a youngster growing up in East Africa. His family lived at the equator under severe tropical conditions. There was no refrigeration available to them for the first eighteen years of his life. As a result, his family had no way of preserving meat, fish, fruit or vegetables. So, like so many generations before them, they used salt to preserve their food.

Meat in particular would rapidly decay under the hot weather conditions of the equator, and salt was the only ingredient that could slow such a process. Keller recalls how tons and tons of beef, lamb and wild game meat were cut up into slender strips of flesh that were soaked in salt solution. Then those strips would be hung to dry in the fierce sunlight, becoming what we in North America would call “Jerky.” Keller never took anything but “Jerky” with him when he went hunting. It made for a light but nourishing meal for the young hunter. Salt both preserved the food in the intense heat and offered great strength when it was consumed.

**That’s always been so. Salt was so valuable that soldiers of the Roman Empire received an allowance of salt as part of their pay** (the origin of the English word salary). In various eras people in Ethiopia and other parts of Africa have used cakes of salt to pay their debts. Salt has been considered very valuable even in our land all the way up current times.

We simply cannot over emphasize how important salt was to earlier societies, including our own. **The question is: HOW DO WE AS FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST SERVE AS A “PRESERVATIVE” IN OUR TIME?** Here is one answer: **Are we not those who have been entrusted with the task of preserving for future generations the Good News of Jesus Christ?**

*Isn't that the essential task of the people of Christ—to be a WITNESS to his presence in the world?*

### **Are we a WITNESS for our Lord?**

A man named Jeffrey Collins tells this story. It had been a trying week at Jeffrey's office at his organization, an organization which is called, quite appropriately, "**Love & Action.**" It was five o'clock on a Friday afternoon. Jeffrey was looking forward to having a quiet dinner with friends. Then the phone rang. "**Jeff! It's Jimmy!**" he heard a quivering voice say.

Jimmy, who suffered from several AIDS-related illnesses, was one of their regular clients. "I'm really sick, Jeff. I've got a fever. Please help me." Though he tried not to show it, this angered Jeffrey. After a sixty-hour work week, he didn't want to hear about Jimmy. Even people whose lives are devoted to doing good, can sometimes suffer from what has been called "**compassion fatigue.**" But, Jeff promised to be right over. **Still, during the drive over, he complained to God about the inconvenience.**

He said the moment he walked in the door, he could smell the vomit. Jimmy was on the sofa, shivering and in distress. Jeffrey wiped his forehead, then got a bucket of soapy water to clean up the mess. He managed to maintain a facade of concern, even though he was raging inside. Jimmy's friend, Russ, who also had AIDS, came down the stairs. The odor from the vomit made Russ sick, too. As he cleaned the carpet around Russ's chair, Jeffrey said he was ready to explode inside. Here he was cleaning up after two men, not just one. Then, suddenly Russ startled him. "**I understand!**" he blurted out. "**I understand!**"

"What Russ?" Jimmy asked weakly. "**I understand who Jesus is,**" Russ said through tears. "**He's like Jeff!**" **Suddenly Jeffrey began to weep. He hugged Russ and prayed with him. That night Russ, as well as Jimmy, decided to follow Jesus home.**

A few years ago, a very popular Christian book came out titled **Out of the Saltshaker and Into the World. It was subtitled, Evangelism as a Way of Life.**

"Salt is good," Jesus said, "but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again?"

The author's thesis is, "**Salt is good, but if salt stays in the saltshaker, what good is it?**" How can it flavor life if it stays in the saltshaker? How can it preserve food if it stays in the shaker? How do we get the salt that will change our world out of the saltshaker? Really, there is only one way and that is for followers of Jesus to live as Christ lived, showing his love for all the world to see. "**You are the salt of the earth,**" Jesus said. "**But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?**" **THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY FOR THAT TO HAPPEN AS WELL. That is by each of us drawing closer to him so that his love will radiate through us.**

"You are the salt of the world," said Jesus . . .**GO...Share what you KNOW...BE HIS WITNESS...SHINE HIS LIGHT!! Amen.**