

Luke 14:34-35 & Colossians 4:5-6
“Optimal Church Communication: Seasoned with Salt”
The Rev. Dr. Jean Halligan Vandergrift
Roslindale Congregational Church, UCC, Roslindale, MA
Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, July 18, 2021

Introductory Piece:

Children and adults, please give attention to the Bible reading. Jesus describes his followers as salt. I wonder what this means. Let’s listen.

The First Reading:

³⁴ “Salt is a good thing. But if the salt loses its salty taste, then it is worth nothing. You cannot make it salty again. ³⁵ It is no good for the soil or for manure. People throw it away. “Let those with ears use them and listen!”

Introductory Piece:

The Apostle Paul, or one of his close colleagues, wrote this letter to the church in Colossae to help them live the faith in their time.

The Second Reading:

⁵ Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. ⁶ Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone.

Salt: It’s hard to pin down what this metaphor means.

In secular circles, salt can signify that which gives life flavor. As a food preservative, it might suggest preserving certain values. Salt can be a positive or a negative as far as our physical health is concerned.

Salt also has mixed meanings in the Bible. In the Hebrew scriptures, for instance, salt is sometimes associated with judgment. After military conquests, troops might salt the fields of the loser to prevent them producing, and you remember the fate of Lot’s wife! But salt is also a sign of positive relationships; to eat salt together meant enduring friendship (Ezra 4:14), and Leviticus (2:13) instructed priests to sprinkle salt onto the sacrifices that worshippers offered to show forth the restoration of their covenant with God.

Jesus employs salt as a positive metaphor. He declares that his followers are “the salt of the earth.” He also underlines that salt is good, and that to be useful, we should never lose our saltiness. Jesus also connected salt to peacemaking: “Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another.” You see, the surface aspirations of middle-class Americans are not the mission of the church!¹ Jesus intended salt to stir up our imagination toward a *better* life and society, built upon the living presence of God, the Kingdom or Reign of God!

Later, one of Paul’s co-workers wrote to the church in Colossae, reiterating that the way that insiders of the church should treat each other and relate to outsiders is with grace, its speech

¹M. Eugene Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible, Vol. VIII* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 183.

“seasoned with salt.” In other words, *grace* is the ‘salt’ that should govern Christian communication and the Church’s interaction with the world.

Grace is not easy to define either. It is good will, mercy, forgiveness, and loving kindness all in one. Grace is the open way that God relates to us and to the world through Jesus Christ, even when we sin. Grace is the good news of renewed, just relationships. Salt.

It may indeed be impossible to pin down just one meaning for the salt metaphor, but you and I can taste it! We may not be able to *explain* salt, but we know when we have *experienced* it through Christians and the church! Just as a bland stir-fry is changed when we add soy sauce, you and I have tasted the difference that God’s grace makes in our communications with each other and our engagement with the world.

Here’s one way you know the taste of salt: Your RCC Directional Statement says that you want to use your gift of hospitality to greet and get to know your neighbors. So this tells me that you want to engage in a way that is “seasoned with salt.” In such a future, people who come to the Food Pantry, for instance, will be able to hear, see, and touch the message: “You are special and important; you are not just a number; you are included in the circle of **God’s grace through love.**”

The deacons of this congregation are salt, too. When they call those who have been absent from worship, these folks can finally taste grace, hearing: “You matter. We care, and we want to hear your story. We want to comfort you in your loss and grief and rejoice with you in moments of celebration.” This is a kind of communication “seasoned with salt.”

(Shake the salt shaker on screen and taste.) Ah! Grace through love tastes good!

Another way we know the taste of salt is when the church communicates God’s grace through **respectful and diligent decision-making.**

The RCC Directional Statement says that we want to bring our gift of racial, economic, and age diversity into conversation with today’s context. Obviously this means doing more than putting up a Black Lives Matter sign, and it will take intentional planning! In order to grow in God’s grace and justice, we will have to keep asking questions that will take us into deeper relationship with each other and show us how we can best practice *anti-racism.*

I can imagine this congregation going forward in this direction. I can imagine you communicating honestly and respectfully with each other across your diversity and differences of opinion. This probably starts by admitting to one another: “I don’t understand what you’ve been through, but I want to, and I’ll work on it.” “I’m not sure I agree with your position on what needs to be done, but I want to learn what God wants, and I need *you* in order to figure this out.” This, too, sounds like ‘the salt talk’ that leads to real change.

(Shake the salt shaker on screen and taste.) Ah! Grace through respect and diligence tastes good!

Here’s the final way I’ll be sharing for today by which we know the taste of salt: God’s grace through the church’s **encouragement.** Young people and children can taste it when they hear from us: “You can do it!” The entire congregation is strengthened by saying: “Together, we can discern God’s vision and help to create a more equitable community. Let’s keep on it!” We can also figuratively hold hands during the Pastoral Search process, which will bolster our trust

in God showing us the way to the settled pastor. All of these are examples of speech “seasoned with salt.”

(Shake the salt shaker on screen and taste.) Ah! Grace through encouragement tastes good!

RCC, don’t dilute your saltiness. RCC, don’t lose your saltiness. Tasteless salt is not good for anything.² “Let *your* speech always be gracious and salty.”

²R. Alan Culpepper, “The Gospel of Luke,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible, Vol. IX* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 292.