

Rev. Mike Cole
Providence Presbyterian Church
February 8, 2026
Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Psalm 112:1-9; Matthew 5:13-20

“Salted by the Gospel”

I have a confession to make. I’m embarrassed to admit this, but it has been weighing heavily on me for quite some time. But I figure if I can’t be real with people who have become my family, who else can I turn to? Here goes. Ilike.....salt. There, I’ve confessed it.

In a salt-free culture, where shaming of salt users runs rampant, I am an oddball. It happens that I have a condition which actually requires salt, so I’m very happy. There is something tangy in the taste of salt that I enjoy - that activation of the salivary gland right about here is such a pleasant sensation. So, when I read Jesus’ words in Matthew about salt I instantly relate. “You are the salt of the earth.” Yes!

Notice that Jesus didn’t say, “You are the sugar of the earth.” or “You are the Carolina Reaper of the earth.” We’re not supposed to be sweet or over the top spicy - just salty. Disciples of Jesus are supposed to enhance life. We’re supposed to bring out the flavor and enjoyment of a God-honoring life. But is that the way the world sees us - a natural seasoning that brings out the best flavors of life?

All too often the church has been bland and banal in its witness to the world. We’ve accepted injustices against ordinary citizens and non-citizens as just the way of the world. We’ve watched silently as racism, violence and divisiveness have taken center stage in our public life. We’ve been slow to speak biblically about our collective responsibility for the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and the imprisoned. We’ve allowed bullies in national, state and local politics to go unchallenged when we know that Jesus would be right there, front and center calling out injustice and hypocrisy. We’ve allowed fear mongers to infect our psyche with their venom and vitriol.

Not only have we not salted public discourse with Christ-like injunctions, we’ve separated ourselves from one another into denominations and non-denominations (which is kind of an oxymoron) and totally diluted our witness to the world. A friend recently reminded me that Jesus prayed only one prayer for the church - “that they may all be one;” (John 17:20) Jesus saw the necessity of his followers being united in order to stand against the principalities and powers of this world.

And yet, through the centuries we have divided, sub-divided and sub-sub-divided ourselves until our voices are barely a whisper in the cacophony of the culture. Even within our denominations and congregations we are divided one from another - conservatives, progressives, liberals, fundamentals, millennialists, pre-millennialists, immersion, dribble, sprinkle, literalists, allegorists, trinitarians, non-trinitarians.... and the list goes on and on. Good grief!

Where is the unity for which Jesus prayed? Why has it been so difficult for the church to be one? Why are we so intent to distinguish and divide ourselves one from another when Jesus prayed specifically for us to be ONE? We have allowed our human craving to be right to blind us to what Jesus says is right. Jesus stated it very clearly; what is right is unity.

Of all the things he could have prayed for - love, peace, joy, forthrightness, courage, faith, patience self-control....he prayed for unity. We are seeing a little movement toward proclaiming more of what unites us than divides us. The Parker Interfaith Council is sponsoring an interfaith night of music in May as a way for people of faith in our community to demonstrate unity. The leaders of that event came to worship with us two weeks ago and Kasia spoke with them about our choir participating that night. It may be a small step toward unity but at least it is a step toward showing our community that people of faith can be united.

We've been all too willing to season our witness with all sorts of spices except the one Jesus called for - salt - that is, behavior that enhances life and calls others to unity in the Spirit. After Jesus calls us the salt of the earth, he says an odd thing. He says, "But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?" Have you ever wondered how salt can lose its saltiness? In water.

When salt is diluted in water, it loses its saltiness. If you use enough water, you can almost completely get rid of the saltiness. That's what has happened to us. We've allowed the gospel saltiness to be diluted by the water of the world. We've allowed so much of the world's dilution into our lives that the saltiness of Jesus Christ is almost non-existent.

Jesus was not some bland, namby-pamby, soft-spoken, wallflower who skirted the edges of culture. Jesus was courageous and prophetic when it came to justice, kindness and mercy. Most of the confrontations which Jesus initiated were with religious not civil authority.

It seems to me that when injustice happens, Jesus is looking to us to speak out. When immigrants are demonized, hounded and deported, Jesus would expect us to speak up for them and welcome them. When the rich get richer at the expense of the poor, Jesus would expect to hear an outcry from us. When the racial makeup of our prisons is in reverse

proportion to our population, Jesus would challenge us to speak up for change. When violence becomes the norm, Jesus would call us to resist violence and rely on our faith. In other words, Jesus would salt our lives with the challenge to welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, tend the sick, give water to the thirsty, visit the imprisoned, and feed the hungry.

One of our difficulties is that we always imagine Jesus “giving it” to others, telling them what for, and setting them straight. But Jesus’ biggest challenges were issued to his own followers - us. His prayer for our unity is the recognition that we are not up to his challenges alone. We need one another’s salt to keep the gospel saltiness from becoming diluted. That’s true as individuals, as congregations and denominations.

This world is a fear-ful place. Many of today’s politicians play on that fear to build their support. But fear never wins. Period. Fear loses. It is love that wins. Hope in the Lord Jesus Christ overcomes all fear. That’s what I John 4:18 says: “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear,”

Our goal as followers of Jesus Christ is to cast out fear with perfect love - perfect love shown by following Matthew 25 to love and care for those who are stranger, hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, imprisoned. Showing love to the least, the last and the lost restores our saltiness. It’s a personal challenge to each of us to respond to those who are different from us not in fear but in love.

Some of you have met my youngest granddaughter, Kai. Several years ago, when she was 9 she visited us for nearly a month. One day she and I drove from Woodland Park to the Springs to go shopping. We pulled up to a stoplight near the Interstate. Off to our left was a man with a sign that said, “Out of work. Anything helps” Kai looked at me and said, “Are you going to help him, Grandpa?” I gave her the standard adult response, “Well, I don’t really know how he will use the money, maybe to buy drugs or alcohol.” I could see that answer didn’t satisfy her so I tried another approach. “There are so many people in need. I prefer to give to the church and other charities to help people like that man.” But that answer rang hollow even to me.

Kai paused thoughtfully, then reached in her pocket and pulled out the twenty dollar bill I had given her to spend while she was shopping and gave it to me, saying, “Give this to him, Grandpa. He needs it and I don’t care how he spends it.” She salted me with the gospel. And a little child shall lead them not to fear but to love. Fear never, never, never wins. But perfect love casts out fear.

Go and be salt for everyone you meet this day and all your days.
In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Charge: Wherever you go, God is sending you. Wherever you are, God will equip you. God will accomplish a purpose in your being where you are. Christ who dwells within you has something He wants to do through you where you are. Believe this and go in God's grace, love and power. Amen