



**SALTY CHRISTIANS**  
**Matthew 5:13-16**

When Maxie Dunnam served in Memphis, TN – he told of seeing a bumper sticker on an expensive car which read “I am a generic Christian.” Underneath those words in small print it said, “Ask me what I mean.” Maxie followed the car and driver and when he stopped asked the man what it meant. The man shared he was tired of denominational labels – he just wanted to be a ‘generic Christian.’ Maxie reflected on that incident and later wrote “I wonder if we don’t have too many generic Christians – and not enough disciples.”

Jesus has just taught the 12 disciples and others what a public life of a disciple should look like. The lifestyle that Jesus was demanding was revolutionary – not generic. The disciples of Jesus are not **urged** to be salt and light – they are defined as **being** salt and light.<sup>1</sup> This is not a call for generic faith.

Most scholars believe that **verses 11 & 12 of chapter 5** serve as a backdrop for understanding the difficult assignment of being salt and light. Jesus and the disciples would face persecution. “If the pressure of persecution causes you to lose your saltiness – you are of no value to anyone.”<sup>2</sup>

What would the disciples do with all the profound teachings and inspiration that their Master was sharing with them? Would they sit around the campfire forever? Would they crowd back into the boats where he first found and called them? As they listened to the words of Jesus, they knew they were revolutionary. These words would produce waves larger than anything they had ever encountered on the Sea of Galilee.

According to Dr. William Barclay and a host of biblical scholars, salt in the culture was as valuable as gold – and held in high regard by all. Military soldiers could receive their pay in salt. Perhaps you have heard the phrases, “Are you worth your salt?” or “That person is the salt of the earth.”

So in that spirit, I want to share three insights about the Lord’s word to his disciples then and now.

**FIRST, JESUS WAS LETTING HIS DISCIPLES KNOW THEY WERE PERSONS OF GREAT VALUE.**

Those fishermen – tax collectors – and other ordinary men who made up the original twelve must have been both elated and energized over these powerful words of Jesus. That this rag-tag army of believers – rather than Pharisees and Sadducees – was going to be the most important change agent and commodity of society had to be totally mind-blowing. It meant that Jesus actually saw them as real human beings. He valued them. They were not a nuisance. They were not generic.

I like the story about a duke and duchess who wanted to review the employment of their servant, Hobbs. The duchess said to Hobbs, “I see by our records that you have been in our employ for 35 years.” **Hobbs said, “That is correct, Ma’am.”** “Well, Hobbs,” said the duchess, “what has been your primary responsibility during those years?” Hobbs replied, “Taking care of the family dogs.” The duchess said, **“Well, Hobbs, according to our records, the family dogs died 27 years ago.”** “Yes, Ma’am,” said Hobbs, “and I would like to know **what you would like to have me do now.**”

The disciples were just too important to Jesus to have them sitting around doing nothing – or just looking holy. With his love empowering them in **Acts 17:6**, they were accused of turning the world upside down. Generic Christians don’t do that.

The disciples were overwhelmed to know that their Master actually valued them and loved them. Dr. William Sloane Coffin, in his books, **THE COURAGE TO LOVE**, shares, “God’s love does not seek value; it creates it. It’s not because we have value that God loves us – it is because God loves us that we have real value at all.” Praise God today that he loves you and because of that, you have value the stock exchange can never take away. God gives us a worth that makes us real and valuable.

## **SECONDLY, JESUS WANTED THE DISCIPLES TO NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE VALUE OF THEIR WORK AND WITNESS.**

Jesus knew that the disciples stood in awe of the might and power of the Roman Empire. They saw themselves as a conquered people. Now Jesus had given them value as persons which the Romans never did – and he did not want them to be discouraged from making their witness. Jesus knew that even a pinch of salt could make a very significant difference.

There are numerous stories in the word of God which start with a moral minority to usher in change and revival. Remember the song many of us learned at camp: **“It only takes a spark to get a fire going.”** God knew that these twelve motley men could start a peaceful revolution that could turn the world upside down today. You know how just a pinch of salt can bring great flavor to a pot roast – a bowl of mashed potatoes – and carrots? Who would eat eggs without salt? Yes, **“You are the salt of the earth.”** You are to bring my zeal and energy to the table of life.

The very same words are addressed to those of us gathered here today. Just a little salt – you will remember – goes a long way. It is a most powerful substance. So could the disciples be that difference in the world.

Add a pinch of salt to a jug of water, and in a short time all of the water will be salty. Put a pinch of salt on the tip of your tongue and in just a matter of minutes it will permeate your entire body. Salt preserves by penetrating every surface and losing itself beneath. The more it penetrates, the better it preserves and flavors life.

There is a great deal of talk today about the word ‘spirituality.’ It is the buzz word of this Generic Generation. Tragically the word ‘spirituality’ has no connection to God. It reflects the self-absorbed narcissism of our culture. The spirituality of Jesus is incredibly specific. It is connected to the totality of the human experience. Our faith touches everything we do.

One of the questions I recently asked my Sunday School class is ‘How does Sunday have anything to do with Monday morning?’ What does faith on Monday mornings look like?<sup>3</sup> Let me share one example with you.

A retired colleague, Donald J. Shelby, once shared during a Lenten study, a businessman in church came to see him concerning a study that he was in with other men in the church. The man shared “Pastor, if I run my business the way the Bible instructs and teaches me, it will cost me my business.” Pastor Shelby shared, “If you don’t run your business the way Jesus teaches you, what else will it cost you?” It takes courage and commitment to follow Jesus. There is a big difference between being a generic Christian and a salty one.

### **THIRDLY, THE WORLD BENEFITS FROM THE SALTY WITNESS OF OTHERS.**

Salt has a powerful, hidden influence, not always seen by the human eye. However, it is God’s way of preserving society – of sharpening the taste buds of civilization. Yes, our everyday actions of love and obedience to God shows others who God is. That is what our children learned today in Sunday School.

The evangelical statesman Dr. John Stott reminds us that we should never underestimate the power and influence that even a small minority can exert in a large nation. The quality of a nation of culture can be transformed when only 2% of its people can have a new vision. Yes, we are given a special value – a special calling – but a special responsibility as well.

Boris Yeltsin was once asked what gave him the courage to stand firm and help insure the fall of communism in the former USSR. He gave credit to Lech Walesa, an electrician who helped bring democracy to Poland. Lech Walesa said he was inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., of America. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said he was inspired by a seamstress by the name of Rosa Parks, who refused to take a seat on a

bus in Alabama – and all the world stood up. She learned it from the Bible and fellow Christians. Never underestimate the value of your work and witness.

Our own Jeff Shirk asked me to share today that “We currently have two positions approved by the Administrative Board open – not filled. They are the Children’s Coordinator and First Service Worship Leader.” Jeff is concerned that “if we cannot find someone to fill those positions both the First Service and the Children’s programs at EUM are at risk. Unlike the federal government, we cannot raise taxes to cover these costs – nor can we demand someone step up to volunteer for these positions.

If we cannot find someone to fill these two needs – the programs will slide – and that could have a major effect on our church family. Please pray about what you can do for our church.”<sup>4</sup>

Yes, you are the salt of the earth. You have a special calling and a special responsibility. We are the church – the called out people of God - people of the way.

Yes, salt seasons, salt heals, salt preserves, salt creates thirst, salt bring out the best. However, salt was also used for making sacrifices, entering covenants, and establishing relationships.

One of my favorite Peanuts cartoons showed Peppermint Patty talking to Charlie Brown. She said, “Guess what, Chuck. The first day of school and I got sent to the principal’s office. It was your fault, Chuck.” He said, “My fault? How could it be my fault? Why do you say everything is my fault?” She said, “You’re my friend, aren’t you, Chuck? You should have been a better influence on me.” Don’t let the salt stay in the shaker – your salty witness is needed here at EUMC.

Yes, what happens in our church Sunday by Sunday is very important. However, the greatest impact will happen tomorrow as you leave this sanctuary to be salty Christians. The Lord has many in your neighborhoods, offices, or cluster groups waiting for your work and witness to be shared with them. Like Peppermint Patty said to Chuck, ‘You should have a better influence on them.’

When I served in Easton, PA, a bright and talented young man from Lafayette College attended our church. He had a promising job interview at one of the major banks in the Wall Street area. I knew exactly where the building was – and got him there on time.

While he was at his day-long interview – I attended the 12:15 p.m. service with Eucharist at the famous Trinity Church. The Rector read from **Matthew 5:13-16** as we did today. He offered one of the shortest sermons I ever heard. He said, “Jesus called his disciples to be salty ones – salty Christians – not faulty ones. The world already had enough of them.” He closed the Bible and sat down. I never forgot it. Spirituality might be the buzz word of our time – but Jesus calls us to be salty Christians – not faulty ones

– or generic ones. Salty Christians made the difference then – and they still make the difference today.

Yes, in a few moments we will sing the Closing Hymn, and I will pronounce the Benediction. Does what happens here today – have anything to do with the rest of your week? Yes, it does.<sup>5</sup> The difference it makes will depend on if the salt leaves the shaker – and enters the world with you.

**“You are the salt of the earth.”**

Amen and amen.

Reverend Eric S. Ritz  
June 13, 2010 – 10:30 a.m. service  
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### ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Fred B. Craddock, [et. al.], **“Preaching Through the Christian Year, YEAR A,”** Trinity Press International, Harrisburg, PA, first edition, 1992, page 107.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, Craddock, pages 106-107.

<sup>3</sup> Foundation for Laity Renewal, **A MONDAY MORNING FAITH**, Bill Peel, First Quarter Sermon Notes, 2010, page 3, [www.TheHighCalling.org](http://www.TheHighCalling.org).

<sup>4</sup> Email from Jeff Shirk, Chairperson SPRC, 6-10-10.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, Foundation for Laity Renewal, page 5.