

This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it. Amen.

³⁸ John said to him, “Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in your name. We tried to stop him, because he was not following us.”

³⁹ But Jesus said, “Do not try to stop him, because no one who does a miracle in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil about me. ⁴⁰ Whoever is not against us is for us. ⁴¹ Amen I tell you: Whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in my name, because you belong to Christ, will certainly not lose his reward.

⁴² “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to fall into sin, it would be better for him if he were thrown into the sea with a large millstone hung around his neck. ⁴³ If your hand causes you to fall into sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed, than to have two hands and go into hell, into the unquenchable fire, ⁴⁴ ‘where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.’ ⁴⁵ If your foot causes you to fall into sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, than to have two feet and be thrown into hell, ⁴⁶ ‘where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.’ ⁴⁷ If your eye causes you to fall into sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸ ‘where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.’ ⁴⁹ For everyone will be salted with fire.

⁵⁰ Salt is good. But if the salt loses its flavor, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.” **This is God’s Word.**

Dear Friends,

As you listened to this sermon text what caught your attention? The part about being thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around your neck? Or maybe the description of hell – worms (really maggots) that gnaw away at your skin “forever” and fire that keeps burning you and burning you and never goes away. Or the part about cutting off a limb or gouging out your eye? That’s all pretty harsh stuff and you might be wondering, “Where’s the gospel?” Where’s the good news I need to hear?” Where’s the love?

Right at the end – Jesus closes this section by giving us “Good News.” We are the salt and salt is good. It kills bacteria (stings a little as it does) but it also preserves and Jesus describes us as salt. So, in light of this portion of scripture, let’s to, **“Be a Salty Christian.”** As we consider the major portion of this text we will see that it means to, **“Put aside jealousy and pride,”** and then to, **“Be filled with the Word of God.”**

I. Do you think it was easy being a disciple of Jesus? We might think that would have been great and yet we have the whole story. Many times we know what Jesus was talking about or we have time to study it and see what the Bible commentaries have to say but the disciples only had the Old Testament prophecies and they had Jesus, who was fulfilling those prophecies.

The disciples wanted to be faithful to Jesus and to do what was right, just as we do, and so John asks a question to see if they did the right thing. **“Teacher, we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.”**

This man was not one of the twelve disciples, he wasn't like them and so John didn't think he was special enough or important enough to be casting out demons. I think John was surprised when Jesus said to let him continue. After all, God's name was being glorified as this man cast these demons out in Jesus' name. And Jesus pointed out, **“No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us.”** You could almost say that this man was gathering in Jesus' name rather than scattering as the Pharisees were doing.

As we think about John's reaction we are reminded that jealousy and pride are a constant threat to the very core of our Christian faith. How many of you think that there are going to only be WELS Lutherans in heaven? Sometimes we give that impression but guess what – there are others who are proclaiming the good news that we are saved by faith alone in Christ alone and they're going to be in heaven too. Why do we sometimes think that way – well, it's because we can let our pride move us to think we are better than everyone else and we are the only ones who have it right.

We often miss the impact pride has on our lives but look at the impact it had on Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. It was pride that really led them into sinning against God and ruining his perfection because they wanted to be like God. Pride is always with us. We like to feel important and needed – even irreplaceable. Yet as we let our pride puff us up we often don't see how it detracts from God's grace.

God's grace isn't about how great we are and the wonderful things we have done but rather it is all about what Christ has done for us. People will forget the things we have done and it doesn't make any difference, but if they don't know what Christ has done for them it makes the difference between life and death. Christ not only paid for all our sins on the cross but the Holy Spirit gives us the gift of faith so we can know Christ and believe in him and trust in him. That's great news that God chose us and gave us this special gift of faith – not because of anything we do, but because he wants to and because he loves each and every one of us.

And it is that gift of faith in Jesus that helps us to put aside all jealousy and pride. It is faith in Jesus that brings us the blessing of forgiveness and helps us to be “Salty Christians.”

That doesn't mean we don't have to struggle with pride. Our sinful nature is always challenging us and the world is right there to try and influence our thoughts and actions. But just as salt preserves meat, so the salt of God's Word preserves us by helping us to recognize and resist the temptation of pride and jealousy and also by bringing us healing forgiveness when we fall into that temptation.

As I think about these verses I am reminded that Jesus didn't let pride influence his life in any way. He was always humble and he was the perfect servant for us. I am thankful that He humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross.

Our world does not give very much credit to those who live humble lives of service. But this is exactly what it means to have salt in us. We put aside our own selfish pride to better serve God by helping those around us. The Apostle Paul wrote, **“Carry each other's burdens, and in this**

way you will fulfill the law of Christ. ³ If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.” (Galatians 6:2-3) And as you strive to be a “Salty Christian” remember that you can’t do it without, **“Being Filled with the Word of God.”**

II. Jesus said, **“If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck.”** Sin is serious business and the warning here is that you don’t want to be the one to cause anyone to sin, especially a child or someone who is new to the faith.

Those are frightening words and the sad part is that I have to admit that I have caused people to sin. Maybe not intentionally but my words and actions have sometimes led someone to sin with me or to have sinful thoughts. Maybe I asked someone to lie for me or to join in when gossiping or making fun of someone. Maybe we have encouraged someone to join us in a drink when we know they have a problem in that area or used peer pressure in some other way. I would guess we all have caused someone to sin or to join in with us as we sin and when we do, the penalty is much more severe than you or I would like to think about.

Then Jesus continues with a gruesome picture of cutting off your hand or foot or gouging out your eye. He was talking figuratively here but the message is just as serious. Don’t invite temptation to be part of your life. Temptation is all around us – we don’t need to jump into Satan’s arms – or, as Peter describes it, into the lion’s roaring mouth.

Avoid those situations that would lead you into temptation. None of is as strong as we think. While we can’t avoid all temptations, we don’t want to invite them into our lives. Luther, when talking about temptation said, “You cannot keep birds from flying over your head but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair.”¹ Temptation is all around us but Shoo that temptation away because temptation leads to sin and sin separates us from God and if we travel down that path we put ourselves in danger of falling away and becoming “unsalty – as Jesus puts it.”

Thankfully, Jesus ends on an encouraging note. **“Salt is good... Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other.”** The salt we need is the salt of God’s Word and it is good. The salt of the law stings as it points out our sin but the salt of the Gospel soothes and heals by showing us our Savior and assuring us that our sins are forgiven.

Sin and temptation try to make us unsalty but God’s grace and mercy that comes to us through his word preserves us as “Salty Christians.”

So be a “Salty Christian.” Set aside jealousy and sinful pride and be filled with God’s Word. Because that is what brings us the Good News about Jesus our Savior. That is what preserves us and prepares us for another week and it is God’s Word that helps us to have true peace. Amen.

¹ <https://quotefancy.com/quote/863641/Martin-Luther-Temptations-of-course-cannot-be-avoided-but-because-we-cannot-prevent-the>