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Mark 9:38-50<sup>1</sup>  
Speak God's Word &  
cause no one to sin.  
19<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Supplementary Lectionary  
Series "B," Gospels

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<sup>38</sup> "Teacher," said John, "we saw a man driving out demons in your Name, and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us."

<sup>39</sup> "Do not stop him," Jesus said. "No one who does a miracle in my Name can in the next moment be able to say anything bad about me, <sup>40</sup> for whoever is not against us is for us.<sup>2</sup> <sup>41</sup> I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my Name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.

<sup>42</sup> "And 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 an upper millstone tied around his neck. <sup>43</sup> If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. <sup>44</sup> Where "their worm/maggot does not die, and the fire is not quenched."<sup>3</sup> <sup>45</sup> And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. <sup>46</sup> Where "their worm/maggot does not die, and the fire is not quenched." <sup>47</sup> And if your eye causes you to 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,<sup>48</sup> where

"their worm does not die,  
and the fire is not quenched'  
(cf. Isaiah 66:24).

<sup>49</sup> Everyone will be salted with fire.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>50</sup> "Salt is good, but if the salt becomes unsalty, with what will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other."

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<sup>1</sup> *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984. All Scripture references are taken from this translation unless noted otherwise.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Matthew 7:21-23.

<sup>3</sup> The United Bible Society's text of the Greek does not include verses 44 and 46. There is, however, enough manuscript evidence supporting the fact that the verses should be included. Their repetition gives emphasis to the warning and point Jesus is making.

<sup>4</sup> Two other options from New Testament manuscripts are possible: 1) For every sacrifice with salt will be salted. 2) For everyone with fire will be salted, and every sacrifice with salt will be salted. In the Old Testament, salt was to be added to the sacrifices brought (cf. Leviticus 2:13).

## DEAR CHRISTIAN, HAVE SALT IN YOURSELF

- I. FOR CLEANSING
- II. FOR PRESERVING

In the Name of Jesus, who has called us, who believe in him, to be the salt of the earth, Dear Fellow-Redeemed,

In our text this morning, Jesus told his disciples that they were to have salt in themselves. In another context, Jesus told his disciples, “you are the salt of the earth” (Matthew 5:13a). Salt has an important function for people.

Obviously, salt can be used for flavoring – for taste. People need a certain amount of salt for their health, along with such additives like iodine. Some countries add fluoride to their salt to help prevent tooth decay, particularly in children. Iron and folic acid are also sometimes added to salt – all for health reasons.

Salt can and has been used for centuries as a preservative. Before refrigeration, salt was the primary preservative for meats such as fish and pork.

Salt can also be used to melt ice in the winter time; or, for making homemade ice cream.

Salt can be used as an astringent for cleansing. The phrase “pouring salt on a wound” certainly causes hurt, but a salt solution can cleanse a wound to prevent infection. Using salt as a mouthwash has a cleansing effect. Salt can purify.

The word “salary” has its root in “salt.” The Roman soldier was sometimes paid in salt. Perhaps that’s where the phrases, “He earned his salt today”; or, the contrary, “He isn’t worth his salt”; are derived.

Salt is used in industry too. The manufacture of paper, plastics and PVC pipe, use salt in the process.

Now Jesus says, have salt in yourself. DEAR CHRISTIAN, HAVE SALT IN YOURSELF ... I. FOR CLEANSING; and, ... II. FOR PRESERVING.

## DEAR CHRISTIAN, HAVE SALT IN YOURSELF

- I. FOR CLEANSING

The use of salt for cleansing, as an astringent, for purifying, has already been noted. Jesus’ disciple John brought a matter to Jesus about which John was concerned. “Teacher,” said John, ‘we saw a man driving out demons in your Name, and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us’” (9:38). John wanted to cleanse the reputation of Jesus as well as the reputations of Jesus’ disciples, by preventing this man – not one of the

close group – preventing this man from doing miracles in Jesus' Name. Jesus had to cleanse John of this notion.

“Do not stop him,” Jesus said. “No one who does a miracle in my Name can in the next moment be able to say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us” (9:39,40). This man was functioning as salt – good salt – in that, in Jesus' Name, he was casting out demons. Moreover, when Jesus says, “whoever is not against us is for us,” he is stating a truth that he would repeat on the night of his betrayal. On that night, Jesus told his disciples, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Both in those words and in our text, Jesus indicates that there is no fence riding when it comes to him. There is no other way to have salvation and eternal life except through Jesus (cf. Acts 4:11&12). There was another way in which Jesus' disciples were to have salt in themselves for cleansing.

Jesus told his disciples, “... 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 an upper millstone tied around his neck” (9:42). Normally, when we hear Jesus refer to the “little ones who believe in [him],” we, appropriately, think of little children, including newborn babies. “Little ones” may, however, include adults who have the simple childlike faith that Jesus wants all believers to have. Do not offend any of these; do not cause them to sin; do not cause them to fall from faith in Jesus. Jesus says that it is better for a person to have an upper millstone tied around his neck – the kind of large millstone that a donkey, mule or ox, would turn – better to have such a heavy millstone around one's neck and to be thrown into the depths of the sea – rather than cause any believer to sin or fall from faith. Jesus emphasizes this point even more.

Jesus said,

***<sup>43</sup> If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. <sup>44</sup> Where their worm/maggot does not die, and the fire is not quenched. <sup>45</sup> And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. <sup>46</sup> Where their worm/maggot does not die, and the fire is not quenched. <sup>47</sup> And if your eye causes you to 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, <sup>48</sup> where***

***“their worm does not die,  
and the fire is not quenched”***  
(cf. Isaiah 66:24) (9:42-48).

Is Jesus speaking about self-mutilation here? No. That is not possible. For self-mutilation would be a sin against the Fifth Commandment, which directs us not only not to hurt or harm others in their bodies but not to hurt or harm ourselves in our bodies. What Jesus is saying, is that the believer should put away any habit or thought that when seen or perceived by others might cause the others to fall away from faith – let alone cause the one guilty of the habit or thought to fall away from faith. Be cleansed of such

things. Along with this and part of this directive, Jesus also wanted believers to be at peace with each other.

Jesus said, "Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other" (9:50b). This was a special directive for his disciples. You may recall from a previous sermon taken from this same Chapter Nine of Mark, that the disciples argued about which of them was the greatest (cf. 9:33-37). Such vying for first place did not create an atmosphere of peace but of friction. Moreover, such vying for first place took away from the disciples being salt, not only for themselves but also for the benefit of others; it robbed them of concentrating on the simple proclamation of God's Word.

#### APPLICATION

So, what do you say? Are you willing to cut off hand or foot or pluck out an eye in order to keep from sinning and in order to keep from leading someone else astray – into sin or unbelief? Some have tried to do this literally. I vaguely recall an early third century church father by the name of Eusebius reporting that Origen, who also lived in the third century, had himself castrated in order to keep himself from sexual immorality. It did not work, because Origen still had a sinful heart that tempted him to think sexually immoral thoughts. So what is Jesus saying to you and to me? What does work?

If you have been in the habit of doing something contrary to God's Word that could lead you or someone else astray – lead them into sin; lead them and you to fall away – then, do not let your hand, foot or eye go there. Avoid those things that lead to such temptations. St. Paul gives a representative list in his Epistle to the Galatians.

St. Paul writes,

**<sup>19</sup> The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; <sup>20</sup> idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions <sup>21</sup> and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the Kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19-20).**

At the same time, St. Paul indicates in his Epistle to the Philippians those things that will guide you as a forgiven child of God to be salt for both yourself and for others.

St. Paul says,

**<sup>1:27</sup> Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ.**

.....  
**<sup>8</sup> Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. <sup>9</sup> Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you (Philippians 1:27a; 4:8,9).**

So, what would be noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy? What could you learn or receive or hear from St. Paul or see in him? Go to the Scriptures! Go to God's Word! Read, mark, learn, inwardly digest and meditate upon God's Holy Word, for that Word of God is indeed noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy. Focusing on God's Word takes the place of permitting your hand, foot or eye to sin and thus cause you or someone else to fall.

Moreover, as you use the Word of God as salt for cleansing, you will also have salt in yourself for preserving.

## DEAR CHRISTIAN, HAVE SALT IN YOURSELF II. FOR PRESERVING

It has already been noted that salt can be used for preserving. The man who was driving out demons in Jesus' Name, although he was not one of the closeknit group of disciples, was, nevertheless, using Jesus' Name for preserving – preserving the souls of people for eternity with Jesus. Jesus applies this lesson for his disciples to preserving the faith of little ones.

You recall that 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 an upper millstone tied around his neck” (9:42). Rather than causing anyone to sin, Jesus' disciples were to preserve faith by continuing to proclaim the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' Name. Jesus also speaks more broadly about the good works that Christians will do as a result of faith in him.

Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my Name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward” (9:42). Such a “good work,” as measured by us, is small – the giving to drink of a cup of water to a fellow-Christian – but such a “good work,” Jesus says, has its reward. How shall we understand the “reward” about which Jesus speaks?

The reward about which Jesus speaks is, first of all, a reward of grace. Grace is God's undeserved love for mankind, expressed especially in sending his Son into the world to be the Savior of the world (cf. John 3:16-18). Since it is by grace that a person is saved, it is clear that God owes believers in Jesus nothing because of their good works. The Apostle Paul makes this statement in his Epistle to the Romans, “Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?” (Romans 11:35; cf. Job 41:11). Indeed, Old Testament Prophet Isaiah confessed, “All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6a). Isaiah is saying that even our “good works,” “our righteous acts,” are not good enough. The good works of Christians must also be cleansed by the forgiveness of Jesus. Nevertheless, by grace, Jesus does acknowledge the good works of those who believe in him.

Jesus told the Jews, “ ... a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear [the voice of the Son of man] and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned” (John 5:28,29). The good works that believers do will be noted as evidence of their faith in Jesus, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8&9). The Christian is saved by faith alone in Jesus; but faith in Jesus is never alone; faith in Jesus always has good works accompanying faith as the fruit or evidence of faith. Yet faith in Jesus will be tested.

Jesus says, “Everyone will be salted with fire” (9:49). Believers in Jesus will be salted by the fire of tribulation, trouble, turmoil, tears, heartache, and sadness – in this life. But Jesus reminds us, “he who stands firm to the end will be saved” (13:13b). As salt is used for preservative, so also Jesus will preserve believers to the end for salvation and eternal life in heaven through his Gospel.

#### APPROPRIATION & APPLICATION

Salt is used for preserving. What preserves you in the Christian faith? It is the same thing that brought you to faith in the first place: The Gospel of Jesus in Word and Sacraments – Holy Baptism and Holy Communion.

The Gospel in the Word is powerful. Concerning the Gospel – the Good News about Jesus – the Apostle Paul writes to the Romans, “I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). Concerning this Gospel, St. Paul also wrote to the Romans, “Faith comes from hearing the Message, and the Message is heard through the Word of Christ” (Romans 10:17) – “the Word of Christ,” “the Message,” is the Gospel. The same power is at work in the Gospel in Holy Communion.

When Jesus instituted Holy Communion, he said, “Take eat. This is my body.... Take drink. This is my blood of the New Covenant, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins” (cf. Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25). The proclamation of the forgiveness of sins in Jesus is Gospel. The Gospel is also at work in Holy Baptism.

Jesus said, “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). Peter proclaimed,

***<sup>38</sup> ... “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the Name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the LORD our God will call” (Acts 2:38&39).***

Peter also states in his First Epistle, “Baptism ... now saves you also” (1 Peter 3:21a). If baptism saves a person, and since the only way a person can be saved is by faith in Jesus (cf. Ephesians 2:8&9); then the Holy Spirit works through Holy Baptism – “the washing with water through the Word” (Ephesians 5:26b) – the Holy Spirit works through

Holy Baptism to create faith – faith also in the hearts of little babies! The Gospel creates and, like salt, preserves faith in Jesus. Here, however, is where Jesus' warning is of special significance.

Jesus says in our text, “ ... 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 an upper millstone tied around his neck” (6:42). What a warning Jesus gives to us parents and grandparents!

What happens to the faith of baptized little ones, if they are not brought to the House of their heavenly Father – to God's House – to Worship? What happens to the faith of baptized little ones, if they are not brought to Sunday School to learn about Jesus their Savior – the Savior who saved them “through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom [God] poured out on [them] generously through Jesus Christ [their] Savior” (Titus 3:5b&6). What happens to the faith of baptized little ones, if there is no mention of Jesus in the home? What happens to the faith of baptized little ones, if there are no Bible lessons taught in the home? What happens to the faith of baptized little ones, if there is no singing of “psalms, hymns and spiritual songs” (Colossians 3:16b) in the home? What if, in the home, no one ever hears: “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so?” Jesus says, “ ... 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 an upper millstone tied around his neck” (6:42). Cut out, then, the hand, the foot, the eye, the mouth, which causes such sin; and replace it with the Word of God!

The Word of God – that salt – will melt the heart of stone – as salt melts ice. That Word of God, the Gospel – that salt – will preserve lives and souls for eternity with Jesus.

## CONCLUSION

Salt can be used for many things. Jesus reminds us to have salt in ourselves. We believers in Jesus will be salted with the fire of tribulation, trouble, turmoil, sadness, heartache and disappointment in this life. But, be salted with the Gospel that increases your faith and makes you strong in times of tribulation. Let that salt of the Gospel also be in your words and conversation and behavior, so that others may hear and be preserved by the salt of the Gospel of Jesus. Amen.