

Sermon Notes: February 5, 2023

[Lectionary Readings](#)

Focus: Stay Salty

Let's look at the humble shaker of salt. Biblically, saltiness is not a description of an ill-tempered and foul-mouthed person (we can thank the US Navy for that). Biblical saltiness is an image of faithfulness and stability. Considering our annual meeting, I want to extend this biblical, not naval, view of saltiness. We are salty, we are faithful, and may we work for a salty future. My sermon will focus broadly on faithfulness, while my notes dig deeply into the substance and idea of salt.

Salt basics

Let me start with the obvious. Humans need salt to live. In our day, we try to avoid salt only because our food is pickled with the stuff. For most of human history, usable salt was extremely valuable and scarce. It took concerted effort to obtain and protect. Wars, ancient and modern, were fought over this resource (see page 2 for an interesting example).

Food and Medicine

Salt was a preservative for food before the refrigerator. Beef jerky: a pre-refrigerator way to store meat. Salt keeps livestock healthy and salty water is medicinal. Salt is a foundation of every civilization --ancient and modern.

The Gospel

In Mark 9:49-50, Jesus says, "salt that has lost its saltiness is no longer good for anything." This teaching is part of a long sermon called "Sermon on the Mount." Jesus wants the hearers to remain faithful and not lose their effectiveness (saltiness). For us, staying salty means returning to the well of Jesus' presence and teaching often.

Salt Covenant

The practice of sealing agreements with salt, known as "Salt Covenant," is not unique to the Hebrews. Egyptian salt covenants were symbolic of eternal stability. Persian salt covenants symbolized the connection between earth and the gods. Most cultures follow similar patterns:

- The covenant is agreed upon and drafted
- The two parties exchange gifts, including salt
- Likely, the salt is shared and mixed ritualistically to symbolized mutual commitment.
- Often, the salt kept in special container and special place like a sacred jar in a sacred space.
- The deal is almost always read to the public and memorialized

The covenant may include animal sacrifice and invocations to the gods to guarantee the authenticity of the deal.

Generally, we can safely assume that salt is almost always a symbol of trust and fidelity, whether agreements between nations or people and God.

Finally: salt among friends

Salt is symbol of hospitality and friendship. Sharing salt creates a bond of trust and friendship. This was the case in ancient Greece and Rome, where the sharing of salt was a common practice when guests were welcomed into a home. I have no idea why we throw salt over our shoulder. The internet tells me spilling precious salt is bad luck, so you cancel this bad luck by tossing salt. I dunno.

History sidenote about war and salt:

The end of the Mexican – American war was formalized by the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. As a result, Texas became part of the United States. In 1866, a legal battle began. By 1877, armed conflict in El Paso erupted almost leading to a second Mexican – American War. This battle wasn't about freedom or remembering the Alamo. It was about Americans like Mills, Fountain, and Cardis wanting more money. They smoked cigars in their drawing rooms while twirling their mustaches. These men fantasized about the 100 dollar bills they would use to light their cigars if they could just charge admission to the Guadalupe Lakes salt flat.



The cigars are my imagination, the illegal privatization of the salt flat was real.

For centuries, the local Mexicans (Indigenous and Spanish) had visited the flats for their basic salt intake. Yet, Mills et. al. created the legal and physical edifice to charge admission to this previously public resource. After some attempts to collect this salty cash, trainloads of armed Mexicans arrive to assert public use. Much hilarity ensues:

- Texas Rangers are captured and executed.
- American flood in from the north.
- The locals suffer dramatic loss.
- By the end of hostilities, people ended up having to pay the toll booth operator anyway <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/el-paso-salt-wars.htm>

20th Century

Salt became part of a civil rights protest. Gandhi and his followers marched to the Indian ocean to dry ocean water. This simple method of making salt was a protest of unfair British economic policy. The crown levied salt taxes



on native Indians. The Brits jailed 60,000 Indians for making “free” salt.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salt_March#Johnson

Todd