

To prepare for this piece, I googled “salty Christians.” I did see a book with that title whose cover I distinctly remember in my teens. Its publication date of 1963 cruelly reminded me of how advanced in years it and I are now. Far more distressing for my sense and sensibilities was the website “be.salt” which is a Christian dating app. It featured a YouTube video posted one week ago on “How to Flirt as a Christian.” Oh my, does it reveal W.W.J.D. on a date?! But back to the matter at hand. Having provided a surprising and challenging list of those blessed of God in Matthew’s previous verses, Jesus now turns to how such ones might impact the world. For those who would follow, Jesus teaches: *you are (to be) the salt of the earth*. You. Me. Us.

Salt was highly valued in the ancient world. In Jewish tradition, the book of Ecclesiasticus (included in the Roman Catholic collection of Hebrew Scriptures) says this: *Basic to all the needs of man's life are water and fire, iron and salt. . .* (39:26). In days before canning and freezing, preserving meat and fish depended on a sufficient supply of salt. In the arid heat of Middle Eastern deserts, you could face a life-threatening crisis unless you replenished the salt lost through sweating. For these reasons, along with its use to flavor food, salt became a valuable commodity commanding a high price. The value of salt in the Roman world has been preserved in our vocabulary. The wages that the Roman army paid its soldiers was called a *salarium*, derived from the Latin word for salt. As in, payments made to somebody worth their salt.

Jesus’ call to be “salt of the earth” is not simply an expression of value but function. Salt’s use is not for itself. You don’t salt salt. Rather, salt’s use is for what you mix it into. Culinary-wise and spirituality-wise, salt is for seasoning. Think, for example, of Jesus’ Beatitudes that precede this teaching on salt. Such lives so blessed of God are, in one sense, the ways in which the earth may be “seasoned” in healing and redemptive ways. Lives of compassion and justice, mercy and peacemaking: by such “saltiness” is the world seasoned for the sake of good and the sake of God. As individuals and as communities of faith: Christ still calls us to be the salt of the earth.

For Reflection and Action:

What, or who, comes to mind in the phrase “salt of the earth; why?

How does, and how might, Our Saviour’s “season” our wider community for goodness’ sake?

For personal reflection: who might need right now the seasoning of grace you can provide?