

The Well-Seasoned Disciple

If you like to cook or appreciate a good meal, seasoning is important to you. You regularly think or say, "That has too much or too little salt." Disciples of Jesus are all seasoned by Word and Sacraments, by sin, by life, by death, by devil. So what does a well-seasoned disciple taste like?

Think you know where I'm going with this? I start with Star Trek, season 1, episode 1 and the salt vampire. Again, I was going to use that for the bulletin cover but it's too scary, but scary, monstrous fits right in to this text. Listen to Jesus: "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." There were 2 kinds of millstones: one turned by hand and another, much larger, turned by a donkey. Jesus says rather than causes a child or a new believer to sin – say by not calling sin, sin, by saying it's okay to sin, by communing with those you know confess a different Jesus than you – you'd be better off wearing cement overshoes! Think of it. Jesus gives you the picture of dying at the hands of mobsters. Being drowned alive. Picture it: see the robe being tied around your neck. See several men throwing the huge millstone off the bridge, and you're dragged along, alive, down into the depths till your lungs burst. Better that than failing to be salt.

A salt vampire image is tame in comparison, but Jesus doesn't stop there. He goes on to the image of cutting off your hand. Aron Ralston did that to free himself from a boulder. Then Jesus goes to amputating your foot. Trapping muskrats, if you didn't check the traps soon enough, they'd gnaw off a leg rather than die in the trap. The images get more ghastly still: plucking out your own eye. Why start talk of well-seasoned disciples with the stuff of horror movies, sci-fi, and nightmares? To set these images over against the ones Jesus gives you of what you're trying to avoid by such drastic actions: Hell. That place where each has their own worm devouring them and it never dies. Look up Prometheus, there an eagle forever eats a part of his liver. Here it's the word for the worm that feeds on dead bodies. Hell is that place where everyone has a their own maggot and where you are forever burning but never burned up.

Talk about well-seasoned disciples starts with such grizzly images because heaven and hell are at stake, but in day to day life it doesn't feel that way. Your education, your income, your social status, your opinion of self, of sin, of salvation, that seem so important, count for nothing. Your relationship to Christ in the day to day mundane things of life, determines everything. Things done literally "upon the name of Me" are never forgotten and are praiseworthy. Give a mere cup of water to someone in Jesus' name and it's rewarded by Jesus. Whom Jesus looks to protect, watch over, reward in this life and with everlasting life are all "who believe in ME." See 'ME' in caps and bold.

Believe in the ME who lived day to day life in your shoes under the requirements God gave to mankind. Believe in ME who lived perfectly in your shoes never sinning in thought, word or deed. Believe in ME who never failed to fear, love, and trust in God above all else. Believe in ME who never gave in to lust, greed, envy, or hatred. And Believe in ME who though a perfect Man was punished as the worse sinner ever. Believe in ME whom all of God's wrath was poured out on. Believe in ME whom maggots devoured eternally and hellfire burned unmercifully till the punishments of God's holy Law were completed, finished, and His anger stilled. All who believe in Me, says Jesus, enter life rather than a living death. So, whatever the cost, pay it. Better to be one hand, foot, or eye in heaven than have 2 hands, feet, and eyes in hell. Nothing you have or can gain is worth losing heaven. Not even the whole world, but the truth is people give heaven up for just a piece of the world all the time. For a few moments pleasure in life, to a lifetime of living as they damn well please, people exchange that for eternal life all the time.

You hear this text as a terrifying warning so loud and scary that you hear nothing else. The Greek ways of expressing the things leading up to the millstone, the cutting, the maggots, and the flames are a warning, but they are also a redirection. The first is *kai os an*. This is a very broad warning. *Whosoever* at any time is a death trap for even one of these little believers better a millstone for him. But when we come to our hand, foot, or eye being a death trap, it's a contrary to fact conditional sentence. Jesus begins each with *kai ean*. *If ever* your hand, foot, or eye is a death trap, cut it off. There's rhythm and a cadence to the Greek 'if ever', is a death trap, cut it off. But the fact is our hand, foot, or eye don't cause us to sin; they don't become death

traps. We've all heard of people who thought they were being faithful to Jesus and followed this text literally. They thought by the outward act of obedience they could avoid eternal maggots and flames. This misunderstanding was in the early church: Already in the 4th century we read: "To follow literally the command... would fail to hear it's meaning (ACC, 124), and "His meaning is that the incentive should be cut off not the members" (Ibid.).

If the chicken isn't well-seasoned, the remedy isn't to remove a wing or leg, is it? But by saying it the way He does, our Lord cuts through the clamor of this world and our ever-craving and craven flesh that direct us away from things eternal to the here and now. Listen to how John says it: All that is in the world: the lust of the flesh and the lust of eye and the boastful pride of biological life not is from God but from the world (1 Jn. 2:16). When what Scripture regards as passing away things become forever things, there is a big problem. But the answer is not: This time I'm serious. I'm going to put eternal things first. I mean it. You know when anyone from friend, to spouse, to child, to coworker makes vows and protestations like this, the one thing for sure is that they're going to fail...again. So once Jesus has your attention, once you see that heaven and hell are on the line, He plunges us into utter despair, and so silences or vows to do better. He says everyone will be salted with hellfire. What hope than do I have? This self-despair is good.

It's always good to be left despairing of self; never good to be left despairing of God's grace in Christ. Jesus doesn't leave us with the salt of hellfire licking at our feet. He leaves us with a promise. Hear Jesus saying, "You do have salt in yourselves (Voelz, *Mark*, 701). This is in accordance with the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus told His disciples: "You are the salt of the earth" (Mt. 5:13). Not you might be, should be, could be, or better be, but you *are*. You are salt by His Word. He *calls* you brothers and sisters and you are. He *declares* you washed of your sins in Baptism and you are. He *pronounces* you forgiven in absolution and that's what you are. He *calls* this Bread His Body and that Wine His Blood and that is what they are. And note Jesus says we have salt in ourselves not just in our hands, feet, or eyes, but in our entire person.

You are salt and salt does 3 things. It seasons, preserves, and cleanses. Christ making us salt means we're seasoned with forgiveness, life, and salvation. We have the Odor of Sanctity about us. We smell of His forgiveness; His life, and His salvation. We taste like Christmas. We smell like Easter lilies. And we look like salt shakers. The salt Jesus has made us in ourselves pours out of us. And as it does, it preserves the world. Before refrigeration, the only way to preserve meat, was to salt it. It stops the decay of death. That the world is dying even scientists admit. Things are coming apart, becoming undone. Christians in the world, all over the world, just by being here are slowing the decay. When we pray every Sunday the Lord's Prayer, we say it as He told us to. Always with the plurals. It's *our* Father, *our* daily bread; it's forgive us *our* sins, lead *us* not into temptation, deliver *us* from evil. One reason for the old custom of ringing the church bell during the praying of the Lord's Prayer was to let the surrounding community know we're praying to God for His grace and mercy for the whole community not just those in the church building. In so doing, the world is preserved.

You are salt in yourselves. You season, you preserve, and you cleanse the wounds of others. Jesus says you have salt in yourselves and then comes a clear imperative, "You must be at peace with each other." The imperatives of the Law follow the indicatives of the Gospel. Jesus says, "Be as you are." You are salt in yourselves and one of the properties of salt is that it cleans. As we think God sees us, that's how we'll see others. If we see God at war with us, God wrathful with us, God judging us and sending us to eternal maggots and flame, as He most certainly does outside of Christ, that's how we'll see others. But you have salt in yourselves, every part of you tastes like Jesus, has been preserved for eternal life, and been cleansed of all sins, so God sees you as we sing: redeemed, restored, forgiven. That's how we can see others in Christ. That's the context here. An unnamed man casting out demons in Jesus' name was stopped by the disciples because He wasn't with the apostles. Nope. The issue is not who is with us or not. It's who is with Christ. Salt is salt you know. In so far as anyone is in Christ they are salt, and we are to be at peace with them.

How many recipes say: salt according to taste? That's a very subjective standard. When it comes to our salting, be assured that Jesus does it by Word and Sacrament and that He always does it just right. Amen.

Rev. Paul R. Harris

Trinity Lutheran Church, Austin, Texas

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