

Do any of you know what Monday, September 21 was? It was designated by the United Nations as an **International Day of Peace**. Now had Diane not been web searching and discovered this it would have also passed my notice – it apparently was a well-kept secret. As I thought, “A day designated for peace,” I also remembered our text from Mark, especially the 50th verse: “Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another” (NIV). We all know the importance of peace, but salt? What is Jesus saying to us in these verses?

As we look at the Scripture we discover that Jesus and the disciples are still in Capernaum and he is still teaching the disciples what it means to be a part of God’s kingdom. They are still gathered in a home and perhaps the child is still sitting on Jesus’ lap. He has just instructed them about children, the least of these, being important in the Kingdom of God. Now John wonders about a man they saw casting out demons in Jesus’ name. Their immediate reaction was to silence this man because, “he was not following us” (38). I wonder how many people we have wanted to silence because they were not one of us.

The disciples are still trying to figure who is in and who is out of the Kingdom of God. They have been arguing over which of them deserve the places of honor in the coming Kingdom. They don’t want to give up their spotlight to a stranger, one who is not one of them. They are wondering if they were right to stop this man from healing in Jesus’ name.

The response of Jesus is one where he in essence is saying their vision of God’s kingdom still is not wide or large enough. God is at work in the world and can work beyond them. This person has to be on our side because anyone who does this in God’s name cannot be against Jesus and his mission. This type of miracle cannot be accomplished unless God is behind it. Even the slightest act of kindness in God’s name brings a reward – a cup of cold water given to a thirsty person. Stumbling blocks must be removed. Let’s not limit the work of God – *Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me” (9:39).*

Stumbling blocks are those things that limit God’s work in the world. He again is using the child as an example and the emphasis is on those who would deny God’s work in the world. Stumbling blocks that keep people from coming to and being a part of God’s kingdom are not what we have been called for. We are called to be the salt of the earth not the police force of who is and who is not a part of the Kingdom.

Be salty! Now when I think of being salty I first think of sailors and what we often refer to as “salty” talk. Not the kind we normally think of as lifting and building up a person or Kingdom. But Jesus refers to us as the salt of the earth.

Now we know that salt is a preservative, a flavoring and a purifier among other things. We also know how “bad” salt can sometimes be for us. Many of us are limiting our salt intake and are watching the salt levels in our bodies. We are conscious of salt in the food we eat, etc. We are not as aware of the importance of salt in the Temple rituals, etc. as the disciples would be. Leviticus and Ezekiel give us a clue of us salt and its use in Temple offerings: *“Season all your grain offerings with salt. Do not leave the salt of the Covenant of your God out of your grain offerings; add salt to all your offerings” (Lev. 2:13 NIV).* And, *“You are to offer them (burnt offerings) before the Lord, and the priests are to sprinkle salt on them and sacrifice them as a burnt offering to the Lord” (Eze. 43:24 NIV).* Salt was so important that Ezra adds to the list of the supplies that are to be given daily to the Temple priests, *“Whatever is needed—young bulls, rams, male lambs for burnt offerings to the God of heaven, and wheat, salt, wine and oil, as requested by the priests in Jerusalem—must be given to them daily without fail”(6:9 NIV).*

Salt played an important role in the life of the community. Even newborns were rubbed with salt (Eze. 16:4). It was also used in purification of water (See II Kings 2:19-21). Here Elisha is confronted with a well that has been contaminated and his directions are that a bowl of salt be brought and it is thrown into the well as an act of purification.

Now I had not thought much about this. Then I remembered our water supply in New Hampshire. Our house had two wells (about 550' each) to supply the water we needed. It was discovered that there was a high mineral content in the water and it was strongly suggested that a purification system be added to keep the pipes (we had hot water heat) from corroding. After it had been installed I looked at the ingredients in the bag of crystals that we added to the system from time to time and the major mineral was salt. It was that which purified our water system and kept the pipes from corroding.

As we continue to look at the role of salt we also come across a Covenant of Salt (Numbers 18:19 and II Chronicles 13:5). The use of the word salt is thought to mean this was a permanent Covenant. It was God signifying to Israel a promise to be with them without fail for eternity. It was a binding agreement. It was a Covenant of Salt.

We also discover that the eating of salt with another was a signal that those who shared in the meal were bound together. Ezra records a letter to the King about the rebuilding of the Temple and in an attempt to stop the work the writer reminds the king, *“Now because we share the **salt** of the palace and it is not fitting for us to witness the kings dishonor, therefore we send and inform the king.”* Ezra’s opposition to the rebuilding sees their loyalty to the King is because they had shared “salt” with the king!

Jesus says, *“Have **salt** in yourselves, and be at peace with one another”* (9:50). We are to be that which preserves, flavors and purifies the world around us. We are those who are loyal to one another, the Covenant of Salt, and to our God. We are to be the people God has called into being and in doing so we need to learn how to live together in peace. Remember, where we are in the story? A man has been found casting out demons in Jesus’ name and he is not one of them. They have told him to stop. In doing so, they have diminished the work of God in the world. God’s kingdom is greater than we can ever imagine – even little children are given a place of importance in it.

We are thus called to remove the stumbling blocks placed in front of those who seek to fulfill God’s call on their lives.

Jesus has a child on his lap. This child represents the greatest in God’s kingdom. His disciples are still trying to discover what it means to be a part of this new movement. They are trying to decide who is and who is not a part of the movement and Jesus reminds them of a God who is greater. He reminds them of their heritage and the salt with which they are to be the flavoring of the world. We need to be salty and at peace!

We need to let God work where God is working. A favorite quote of a friend to the mission of the Church today: **“We need to find where God is working and go out and join in.”** Or, in the words of Paul, *“Let all your conversation always be full of grace, seasoned with **salt**, so that you may know how to answer everyone”* Col. 4:6 NIV.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quoted is from NRSV, NCCC/USA 1989
NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1989