

"JUST A PINCH OF SALT, PLEASE"

A Sermon By

Philip A. C. Clarke

Park Avenue United Methodist Church
106 East 86th Street
New York, New York 10028
October 1, 1989

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INTRODUCTION

In his book, Salt for Society, Philip Keller tells of his experiences as a youngster growing up in East Africa. Even though his family lived at the equator under severe tropical conditions, there was no refrigeration available to them for the first eighteen years of his life. As a result they had no complex methods of preserving meat, fish, fruit or vegetables. Thus, like so many generations before them, they used salt to preserve their food.

Meat in particular would soon decay under such hot weather conditions and salt was the only ingredient that could slow such a process. Keller recalls how tons and tons of beef, lamb and wild game meat were cut up into slender strips of flesh that were soaked in salt solution. Then those strips would be hung to dry in the fierce sunlight, becoming what we in our land would call "Jerky". Keller never took anything but "Jerky" with him when he went hunting. It made for a light, but a nourishing meal for the young hunter. Salt both preserved the food in the intense heat and offered great strength when it was consumed.

DEVELOPMENT

No ingredient preserved food any better than salt. It has been used by countless cultures for their very survival. In ancient Palestine salt was as valuable as gold, and was held in the highest regard by all. In so many varied situations, salt was the difference between life and death. Thus, when Jesus referred to His disciples as "the salt of the earth", He was both bestowing upon them the highest honor and demanding from them the greatest responsibility.

And no sooner had He spoken the Beatitudes to those faithful followers on top of the mountain than He proclaimed,

"You are the salt of the earth". Yes, you are the pinch that can preserve society from decay and decomposition. You are the ingredient that can add that extra flavor which makes life an exciting reality. You are the salt of the earth."

Now I believe those first "believers" must have been both elated and somewhat scared by such words. They - that little motley group following this Galilean around from village to village - those twelve disciples who listened to His words and marvelled at His deeds, they were "the salt of the earth". Through their lives and their witness, their faith and their fortitude, this old world of ours would be preserved and the Kingdom would be served. Let's face it...that's a pretty big assignment, an awesome responsibility!

"You are the salt of the earth". Those very same words are addressed to those of us gathered here today. Just a little salt, you'll remember, goes a long way. It's a powerful substance. Add a pinch of salt to a jug of water and in a short time all of the water will be salty. Put a pinch of salt on the tip of your tongue and in just a matter of minutes it will permeate your entire body. Salt preserves by penetrating every surface and losing itself beneath. The more it penetrates, the better it preserves. Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth".

ARE YOU LISTENING

Are you listening? These words of Jesus carry with them both honor and responsibility. As we go our separate ways in the days of this coming week, remember this that the power of all creation is taken through us to all the world. And that every person we meet can be strengthened simply through our lives - our witness, our words. The homeless person on the street. The person in the office. After all, just a pinch of salt preserves. As we scatter out from this beautiful sanctuary on to the sidewalks and into the streets of this city, we take with us all the ingredients necessary to keep all human life as meaningful and significant as it can be.

In a sense, it's OK for us, I suppose, to say "This is MY church"...as we did last Sunday as we celebrated our Homecoming, but let's try to always remember that in the final analysis it is never OUR church, is it? It's not our Church...this is God's house.

I mentioned earlier in the service that this is the fourth hymnal of the Methodist Church that I have held in my hand. The first one went out of use in 1939 and 1940. 1939 was the year that three Methodist bodies in America joined together to form what was known from 1939 to 1968 as "The Methodist Church". One of those previous bodies was the "Methodist Episcopal Church". I can remember serving some small rural churches in the early years of my ministry which still had plates and chairs and dishes with the strange inscription on them, "Property of the ME Church". (The ME stood for Methodist Episcopal. And that's what a lot of folks would like to have the Church be. "The ME Church". They would like the church to exist only for them - to support all of their prejudices and to second all of their motions. But the Church is God's Church - first and foremost. He's the One who is in charge around here. We aren't.

The world does not always see the church at work, but it never ceases to feel our presence. It matters not where we go - to the office, the classroom, the field, the kitchen, the hospital, the factory - through our witness and our words of testimony to the "riches of Jesus Christ", all of life around us is preserved. Christian disciples keep the standards of this nation from falling and the starving from faltering. The more we penetrate all avenues of life, the more Christ can preserve life through us. Every person we touch is made "salty" and everywhere we travel human existence takes on so much more flavor. "You are the salt of the earth". Through your life and mine, Christ's love can penetrate society.

OUR MEAL TODAY

Generally we think of salt before consuming our meal.

Many of us like to sprinkle our food with salt and all of us wish we could. After all, who enjoys eating a hard boiled egg without salt, or a piece of corn on the cob, or a luscious Jersey tomato?

Our meal this morning, however, is a bit different. The food is already prepared and the table is set thanks to our communion committee. We only need to receive the elements and consume them to be strengthened by it. The salt is already in the elements.

However, after we have shared in the meal and communed with the power of the Living Christ on this World Communion Sunday, the salt comes into play. For then and only then, will we go out into our daily routines so filled with

faith and hope, with zest and vitality of life that everyone we meet and every situation we encounter will be filled with a new flavor because of us. Salt your food today before you eat lunch - if you must...but remember that after this meal here today you will be the salt, or else there will be none at all.

Dear friends in Christ...it still remains true that "you are the salt of the earth". You are the pinch that preserves and someone today desperately needs the strength and sustenance which only you can give. Who is it. Think about it as you receive the elements and then, for the sake of Christ, do something to preserve...to make a difference.

LET US PRAY

"Help us, gracious Father, with open minds and contrite hearts to feel our way into the meaning and the mystery of these moments. Quicken our imaginations to the end that we may sit at table with the Twelve and open ourselves to the close-up presence of the Christ.

Let this time here this hour be for us a time of resolution. Confirm within each of us the resolutions and the intentions of these moments.

Bless us with a renewed and enlarged awareness of our need for grace and a stretching of soul as we remember that we are the 'salt of the earth". Indeed, it is an honor and a responsibility for each of us.

Our prayers we offer in trust and thankfulness. May we see in the bread and the cup...plainly, clearly and simply stated, the meaning of our existence and of Your purposes for us and all Your people. In the name and spirit of Christ, we pray. Amen"

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LAY READER: Donna Evans

DATE: Oct. 1st

BEFORE

"The Scripture Reading for today is taken from the
Gospel According to St. Matthew Chapter 5, verses 13 - 16
It is found on page 838 in the Bible that is in the pews.

AFTER

"Thus endeth the reading taken from the Holy Scripture.
May God add His Blessing to the reading of His Word and to our
understanding of it. Thanks be to God! Amen!"

INSTRUCTIONS

1. The minister will give you a nod when to come forward. He will make sure the Bible is open to the proper page for you.
2. After announcing the passage to be read, PAUSE...for about 15 seconds to give people the opportunity to locate the reading in the Bible in the pews.
3. Read slowly. Don't rush it. Keep your voice "up"... smile a bit if you can remember to. Be sure to project your voice out...the person on the last row has to be able to hear you.
4. Careful walking up....careful walking back down. Go slowly.

DEDICATION OF THE HYMNALS

Today we are dedicating the new hymnal in our Church of our United Methodist Church.

Our thanks to all who gave so generously to our hymnal fund across these past twelve months. The financial drive...the hymnal fund in our Church for \$4,000 was headed up by Donna Evans who reads the scriptures for us this morning. A member of the Worship Committee...

As I recall, we begin our appeal a year ago on the first Sunday of October, hoping that the hymnals would be here this month. They are. They are there in the pews...all 350 of them.

This is the fourth hymnal of the Methodist Church that I have known, loved and held in my hand. It will take us a while to become familiar with its contents...a while to memorize certain hymn numbers.

We'll have to watch our "hims" and our "hers" for a while... and yes, "Onward Christian Soldiers" is still in there as is "Faith of our Fathers".

The hymnal has an inclusiveness that is rare. Chances are, I will be stumbling around with it for a while...I'm one that doesn't change my ways easily.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Sunday, October 1, 1989

I. WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY / AN INVITATION

- A. Today we celebrate World Communion Sunday...always the first Sunday of October. And for the benefit of visiting friends, we like to announce that the Table of Our Lord is open to all.
- B. A word regarding procedure...the elements will be served to you in the pews...upon receiving them, please hold them until all have been served...and then together - as one family of faith - we shall commune.

II. PICK UP YOUR COPY

- A. Be sure to pick up your copy of our monthly news sheet, "A Word in Edgeways". Copies are by the door...thanks once again to Lucy Dinnes, our editor, who does such a grand job of bringing it all together...and writing it up with such a flare!

III. PARISH CONCERNS

- A. The parish concerns are lifted up for you in the bulletin. Take a moment to review those announcements on your own...noting the study / spiritual growth opportunities and the meetings of this coming week...and also the Adult Fellowship gathering...and the UMW District Meeting of Saturday.
- B. Two weeks from this evening we shall hold our first Fellowship Supper of the Fall. The Outreach Committee will sponsor it and a good program is in the offing. Be sure to sign up downstairs with Jane Chaney regarding your contribution for the food table.
- C. I've invited Duane Thompson to say a few words about the special opportunity for the laity on Tuesday mornings at 7:30. It started last Tuesday and George Leopold and Duane are providing leadership for it. Let me present Duane Thompson to you...chairperson - elect of our Education committee.
- D. Coming dates: Saturday, October 28th - Rummage Sale. November 18th - Church Fair.

IV. OFFERING / SPECIAL APPEAL

- A. For many years now we always receive a special offering on World Communion Sunday....Fellowship of Service and Suffering. Envelopes are in the pews...throughout October. Hope you will respond. More blessed to give than it is to receive.

V. FRIENDS FROM FORMER DAYS

- A. How wonderful to welcome back a former Lay Leader of our Church and his wife...with us today are Harold and Deborah Black...who were very much a part of this church from 1950 on...Harold was that is. Deborah came into Harold's life and our life here in 1958 and they were married here in the Fall of 1959...30 years ago on November 28, 1958...31 years ago this November.

Harold was not only our LL, but also Sunday School teacher, Sunday School Super., Education Committee Chairperson....member of all of our committees...and the only male young adult in the church when I came on the scene here.

- B. Here for a wedding last night...and how grand to have them here...all of their 5 children were baptized by me here in the Church. Part of that little group of dedicated people who were determined not to see this church close its doors.

VI. ~~TONIGHT AROUND 6~~ pm... *2 p.m.*

- A. Our parsonage has been renovated during the Summer...and needs a bit of tidy up...if any of you are available to help this evening in dusting and moving furniture...Lynn and I would be most grateful...come, dressed for some dusty work...21 East 87th Street. 11 D....speak to me if you are free to lend a hand.

GREETING TO THE CHILDREN: September 24, 1989

WELCOME HOME

Welcome "home"...boys and girls...it's wonderful to see you all again....

A lot has happened down here in our church since you were last here! Our sanctuary has been re-painted...redecorated...restored to its original beauty, brightness and color. It's been a busy summer here...but a good one.

We're going to rededicate our sanctuary here in a few moments and we certainly want you here for it..you're an important part of our Church. But before we do this, let me just say a few more words to you about our church.

DEVELOPMENT

We need to keep God's house looking at its best. Every fifteen years we need to do this here...and the next time we do it some of you will be in college or through it...out on your own.

We are blessed to have such a lovely church home...a place like this to come and be quiet...to worship God...get close to him...read the Bible and say our prayers and sing our hymns. We have much to be thankful for in this regard and one of the ways to thank God is to "pass His blessings on to others"...perhaps a story will help you to understand what I mean.

A family had rented a cottage at the beach this Summer...and the second day of the vacation the father was out back of this cottage...digging a hole...to plant a plant. His children were puzzled...why...on vacation and on a hot sunny morning why dig a hole and plant a plant.

"Well" the father said.."it's a century plant". "It blossoms about once every 20 - 30 years" he told his children. They were still somewhat puzzled and curious. After all this was a rented cottage...they might never return...they'd never see the plant...20 years....and they continued to watch their daddy dig this hole for the plant under the hot sun. Then he added,

"I happened to see a plant like this the other day... and realized that someone 20 to 30 years ago wanted to share it with me and whoever it was planted it for my enjoyment....Some day...I said to myself...I'm going to plant such a plant so that people will enjoy it after I'm gone...and that's what I'm doing this morning."

LOVELY STORY

Isn't that a lovely story. The best way to say THANK YOU, boys and girls, is to PASS ON...what we have received.

How blessed you and I are to have such a beautiful church in which to worship....Sunday after Sunday....sometimes we take it a bit for granted. We have to work to keep it "up"....to keep it looking good.

HOW BLESSED WE ARE

Thirty years ago....back in 1959...a small and struggling congregation worked hard...sacrificed... to redecorate this sanctuary. It hadn't been "touched with paint" since it was built in 1927. What a difference it made to those who came along in the sixties and seventies...

And then in 1974, those who were here then...struggled and gave... as we had a partial redecoration....made it possible for us to enjoy the church these past 15 years.....

And now that's what we have done this Summer and I'd like to think we're saying "THANK YOU" to God for this Church...His House...by doing what we've done...passing it on to others who will come in here and worship. Pass it on...a good way to thank God for His blessings.

LITANY

Now, boys and girls...and all of you....there's a little service of rededication in the bulletin...take it out and let's get on with the rededication.

Let me invite our Lay Leader and Chairman of the Board of Trustees, William Bell, to join us up here at the altar. Also, let me invite Larry Morales, Chairman of the Finance Committee, a Trustee and the person who headed up the sub-committee of the Trustees that supervised the many little details and decisions that were involved with this restoration project.

We do hope you like what you see. My thanks personally to both Larry and Bill for their support along the way...many labors of love...my thanks to all of you who have contributed your gifts to make this miracle possible. The gifts have come from all over...England, Indonesia, South America... Across the US....from people who have remembered and who are thanking God for what this church has meant by "passing it on" to others who will come along in the decade ahead. God bless you all and thank you.

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A family had rented a cottage at the beach this Summer...and the second day of the vacation the father was out back of this cottage...digging a hole...to plant a plant. His children were puzzled...why...on vacation and on a hot sunny morning why dig a hole and plant a plant.

"Well" the father said.."it's a century plant". "It blossoms about once every 20 - 30 years" he told his children. They were still somewhat puzzled and curious. After all this was a rented cottage...they might never return...they'd never see the plant...20 years...and they continued to watch their daddy dig this hole for the plant under the hot sun. Then he added,

"I happened to see a plant like this the other day... and realized that someone 20 to 30 years ago wanted to share it with me and whoever it was planted it for my enjoyment....Some day...I said to myself...I'm going to plant such a plant so that people will enjoy it after I'm gone...and that's what I'm doing this morning."

LOVELY STORY

Isn't that a lovely story. The best way to say THANK YOU, boys and girls, is to PASS ON...what we have received.

How blessed you and I are to have such a beautiful church in which to worship....Sunday after Sunday....sometimes we take it a bit for granted. We have to work to keep it "up"....to keep it looking good.

HOW BLESSED WE ARE

Thirty years ago....back in 1959...a small and struggling congregation worked hard...sacrificed... to redecorate this sanctuary. It hadn't been "touched with paint" since it was built in 1927. What a difference it made to those who came along in the sixties and seventies...

And then in 1974, those who were here then...struggled and gave... as we had a partial dedecoration....made it possible for us to enjoy the church these past 15 years.....

And now that's what we have done this Summer and I'd like to think we're saying "THANK YOU" to God for this Church...His House...by doing what we've done...passing it on to others who will come in here and worship. Pass it on...a good way to thank God for His blessings.

LITANY

Now, boys and girls...and all of you....there's a little service of rededication in the bulletin...take it out and let's get on with the rededication.

Let me invite our Lay Leader and Chairman of the Board of Trustees, William Bell, to join us up here at the altar. Also, let me invite Larry Morales, Chairman of the Finance Committee, a Trustee and the person who headed up the sub-committee of the Trustees that supervised the many little details and decisions that were involved with this restoration project.

We do hope you like what you see. My thanks personally to both Larry and Bill for their support along the way...many labors of love...my thanks to all of you who have contributed your gifts to make this miracle possible. The gifts have come from all over...England, Indoesia, South America... Across the US....from people who have remembered and who are thanking God for what this church has meant by "passing it on" to others who will come along in the decade ahead. God bless you all and thank you.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Sunday, October 1, 1989

I. WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY / AN INVITATION

- A. Today we celebrate World Communion Sunday...always the first Sunday of October. And for the benefit of visiting friends, we like to announce that the Table of Our Lord is open to all.
- B. A word regarding procedure...the elements will be served to you in the pews...upon receiving them, please hold them until all have been served...and then together - as one family of faith - we shall commune.

II. PICK UP YOUR COPY

- A. Be sure to pick up your copy of our monthly news sheet, "A Word in Edgeways". Copies are by the door....thanks once again to Lucy Dinnes, our editor, who does such a grand job of bringing it all together...and writing it up with such a flare!

III. PARISH CONCERNS

- A. The parish concerns are lifted up for you in the bulletin. Take a moment to review those announcements on your own... noting the study / spiritual growth opportunities and the meetings of this coming week...and also the Adult Fellowship gathering...and the UMW District Meeting of Saturday.
- B. Two weeks from this evening we shall hold our first Fellowship Supper of the Fall. The Outreach Committee will sponsor it and a good program is in the offing. Be sure to sign up downstairs with Jane Chaney regarding your contribution for the food table.
- C. I've invited Duane Thompson to say a few words about the special opportunity for the laity on Tuesday mornings at 7:30. It started last Tuesday and George Leopold and Duane are providing leadership for it. Let me present Duane Thompson to you...chairperson - elect of our Education committee.
- D. Coming dates: Saturday, October 28th - Rummage Sale. November 18th - Church Fair.

IV. OFFERING / SPECIAL APPEAL

- A. For many years now we always receive a special offering on World Communion Sunday....Fellowship of Service and Suffering. Envelopes are in the pews...throughout October. Hope you will respond. More blessed to give than it is to receive.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

Minister: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Minister: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them up to the Lord.

Minister: Let us give thanks to the Lord,
our God.

People: It is right to give our thanks
and our praise.

Prayer by the Minister:

"Gracious God:

You are the source of all joy and
delight, the fount of all consol-
ation and hope.

Thus we laud and honor You in every
circumstance of life,
As Your people redeemed by Christ.

We gather in congregations this day
of Your church to praise You in
word and song,
As the Scriptures are read and ex-
pounded,
As the Sacraments are celebrated
for our benefit.

Therefore we offer to You the
United Methodist Hymnal

As a testimony to Your goodness,
As a guide to Your people at prayer,
As a source of strength and help to
all.

Receive this from our hands, the gift
of a multitude of labors.

By the Holy Spirit who filled the
hearts of authors, poets and com-
posers, of translators, editors and
revisers:

Fill the whole people of United
Methodism,

That millions of voices in one accord
may tell your good works
from generation to generation."

People: Blessed be Your name for ever.
In Your goodness, hear our prayer.

(Standing, all holding a hymnal in hand,
lifted up to God, prepared to sing verses
one and two of hymn number fifty-seven:)

People and Minister:

"O God, before whose throne praise and worship
continually are offered, where trumpets sound
and saints and angels sing:

Accept this, THE UNITED METHODIST HYMNAL,
which we this day offer to Your great glory,
in praise of our risen and ascended Lord.
Amen. Alleluia!"