

Seasoning the World

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I know its not everyone idea of a relaxing evening, but my favorite way to unwind is to cook. And I am not a big follower of recipes, I like more to experiment, to play with different ingredients and seasonings.

Especially seasonings. I actually have kind of a spice problem. The spice section of our cabinet is always creeping beyond its allotted territory. Because I love to get new spices and seasonings to try them out. And of course, you want to cook something using one whole star-anise. And now you have a jar with the rest of them sitting in your cabinet for the next decade.

But one of the absolute highlights of cooking for me is when I taste something, and I can tell just what it needs. It almost seems like magic the way a couple shakes of this, or a pinch of that, can transform a whole pot into something almost entirely new.

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You are the salt of the earth. Jesus says. He is talking to a crowd on the side of a hill, people who have wandered out of their ordinary lives to encounter this new teacher.

You are the salt of the earth. Jesus says. He is talking to us. People who have gathered under the canopy of his grace and behind his name to live out our faith in the world.

You are the salt of the earth.

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I've been on the receiving end of some pretty aggressive evangelism in my day. Perhaps you have too. Has someone ever walked up to you on the street, or popped up in your social media feed with an especially forceful pitch?

I once had a man walk up to me on the sidewalk in New York, a man who I had never met, whose opening words to me were “If you died tonight, do you know beyond a shadow of a doubt where you would spend eternity.”

I just kept walking, but I almost wanted to stop and ask him if he has ever had a meaningful conversation grow out of that prompt. If anyone ever said, “No I don’t! Tell me more!”

For a growing number of people in the world, that kind of approach is their first association with Jesus’ followers.

And it is of course because Christians have squandered our reputation in plenty of big ways over hundreds of years. Spreading our religion around the world at the point of a sword. Wedding our hopes to the fickle loyalty of partisans. Dipping hatred and bigotry in the veneer of faith. Sending our LGBTQ kin toward the exits.

For a long time the prevailing image of how Christians live their faith in the world has been, in some form or another, the language of conquest. We want Christianity to be dominant. We want to win people over. People act as if their job is to fight for God's territory in the world.

And that idea that our faith is meant to conquer the world leads to things like that guy with his somewhat aggressive pitch on the city sidewalk.

I have had many conversations with members of this church about how tempting it is to describe this church in terms of what we are not, to reassure people that we are not like the sidewalk proselytizer.

And yet, even though we are not accosting people on the sidewalk with questions about their eternal soul. Even though we are not trying to conquer the community.

We are also not just shutting ourselves up in this building and keeping to ourselves.

So how would we describe the way that we *do* try to transform lives and shape our community?

I like the image that Jesus uses. Seasoning. You are the salt of the earth.

Its not about confronting or overpowering. It isn't about imposing our values on others. Telling everyone that they should be just like us.

Rather, we are called to season our world with the flavor of God.

To add ourselves in with the community God has set us among in a way that awakens people to the power of love and the beauty of creation. To live in ways that awaken people to the movement of the Spirit. That make God's love unmistakable.

Today we are here to celebrate a big accomplishment of this church.

The completion of our Youth Room project which is now up and running as a resource to this wider community.

We built this space because we tested the flavor of our town and had that almost magical sense that we knew just what was missing.

And we asked around and others agreed. So we got to work to get this done for Milton.

In opening this new space, we are adding a bit of flavor to the town.

Taking our place among the many people and organizations that faithfully strive to make our neighborhoods, our town, our region, and even the world, a little better, in the big and little ways that we each can.

And this way of shaping the world is not just about the big projects, that we take time to mark and celebrate.

This is a way of life for us.

You are the salt of the earth. The way that you treat other people in your life is an essential part of how God loves the world.

You are the salt of the earth. The example you set for the children in your life is an essential way that God teaches the generations.

You are the salt of the earth. The way to live imparts a flavor. It leaves people feeling a certain way.

The choices you make each day make the world what it is. Our world is simply the sum of the ways we choose to treat our neighbors, our families, and our planet.

I know that one of the most frustrating things these days is to see the big problems of the world that seem insolvable. The tears in the fabric of civil society that seem like they may never mend.

This is not to say that we should not endeavor to address these great crisis head on. But at the same time it is important to remember that the most important way any of us change the world is by the way we are in relationship with our immediate surroundings.

The flavor we bring to the people we spend our time with, and the places we live and move.

And Jesus word has a sharp edge to. "If salt has lost its saltiness, it is not good for anything."

It is an important warning to us. A word of challenge that we continually guard against become self-obsessed. It is Jesus saying that if our presence in the world doesn't matter to the world beyond these walls, then we might as well not even be here.

I am proud of this church, and the way that we have found a way to contribute to healing a hurt among our neighbors. My hope is that for some in our wider community, they have gotten a taste of the

generosity of God in the generosity of this church. My hope is that we have given people a glimpse of God's love for them, in the way that we are loving them.

My hope for all of us is that we can live our lives in ways that bring God's flavor into all the places we go. Offering God's love to others in the simple generosity of our own spirits.

Not only is it a lot nicer than yelling at someone on the sidewalk.

But I think its actually the way God changes the world.

