

October 7, 2012

Scripture Lessons *Hebrews 1:1-4*

Mark 9: 42-50

Sermon *Please Pass the Salt*

I suspect I am not alone in this but a couple of years ago my doctor put me on a mild blood pressure medication, not because any of my parishioners were giving me the screws enough to raise my blood pressure or anything like that. No but what do you suppose was one of the main culprits in the problem beside of course, needing to take off a pound or two. What do you think was causing my blood pressure to go up? What was it? Salt, did you get the hint from the pastor. Salt. I don't have to tell you we have way too much of it in our diets and it is in everything from meat, vegetables, to snack food and anything that is prepared that we eat. And not just salt to taste but are far too excess in most cases. What a far contrast from the ancient world: the world of Jesus time. In that world, salt was a necessity for life and it was absolutely so valuable that in some incidences, and I am sure you have heard of this. It was used actually as coinage in business transactions; because in a beastly hot climate salt not only helps to preserve bodily fluid, but in a world of very little spice and a world of very little tang, salt added flavor to life.

So what does salt have to do with millstones and cutting off body parts as we read from Mark's gospel lesson that we read for today. Well when you look at Jesus' words about how we treat people who might be wrestling with their faith or treat people who are dealing with things in their lives which causes them to be separated from God and their neighbors. The first thing that occurs to us is a radical nature of Jesus' words in this passage. There is no pussy-footing around or walking on egg shells with Jesus' words today. Instead his words are blunt; they are bold; they are impossible for us to miss. If in our dealings with our brothers and sisters in faith in this world we make it difficult for them to nurture their relationship with God especially in times of struggle by placing stumbling blocks in their way. Well as far as God is concerned we might just as well tie a huge weight around our necks and jump in the water and drown.

And what might such a stumbling block be? We might ask ourselves. Well I think it usually has to do with our failure to put ourselves in the other person's shoes-other person's moccasins as some people put it. When those people are experimenting a crisis in their lives which for us amounts be just self-centeredness. The crisis, of course, could be almost anything in that person's life that they are struggling, with aging parents, dealing with a teenager, with a family with an

addiction problem, to a divorce, to illness, to financial trouble or anything else in between. If we as friends, if we as family members if we have brothers or sisters in faith fail in our task to be good and supportive and loving listeners and companions along life's way. If we find fault; If we criticize; judge or moralize and speak or act in generally in an uncaring way that is when we place a stumbling block in the path way of vulnerable person who might need our help and that is where, I think, the millstone in the story comes in.

And similarly when Jesus speaks about the parts of the body, the hand, the feet, the eye—it isn't too much of a stretch if we take his words to be speaking about anything in our lives that keeps us from keeps us or blocks us from having a loving relationship that we were meant to have with God and our fellow human beings all around us. Such things might includes aspects such as our own human nature like our pride or our anger or our bitterness or our prejudices or the distractions in life which can become our worse or our career or material possessions or hobbies or even running to and fro trying to keep up with our own children activities which can be many and which can be varied. All you have to do is ask a parent in today's world. Anything that Jesus says that blocks or distracts us from having our relationship we were meant to have with God or with our neighbors should be reexamine, should be prioritize or should be even eliminated from our lives from time to time as if they were unhealthy parts of the body being surgically somehow removed.

Now let me ask you a practical question here. Did Jesus literally want us to tie stones around our neck and drown ourselves? No. Second question did literally want us to chop off our hands or feet or pluck out our eyes. No. Ok we got that established Of course not. Does Jesus does use this prickly salty language for a reason? Absolutely. Jesus' point is the time of complacency, the time for business as usual is long over. Life is too short. God's work is too important. Our relationships with God and other people are far too precious to let anything in life to distract or get in the way of those relationships. So in this Communion Sunday, makes me think about this, and the word from Jesus from Mark's gospel is that we in the modern world who are too busy with our agendas , our business or too distracted by our emotions, our activities, we need to be a lot more radical.

We need to be a lot more salty. We need to run more against the grain of the world around us in this way. We need to slow down a lot. We need to be quiet. We need to downsize both physically and spiritually in our lives and we need to focus. We need to focus on tearing down walls, and we need to finally focus on throwing away the stumbling blocks. Throwing away the stumbling blocks that might separate us from God or from each other. So I invite you as we come together around the God's table today to remember this we stumbling one against ourselves , neighbors and friends in Christ and also those out in the community

that we can invite to be a part of God's love. So we are invited to mediate upon this as we come around God's table.

Together we say AMEN