

Perhaps you have heard the saying, “If it looks like a duck, swims like a duck, and quacks like a duck, it probably is a duck.” We identify things by their characteristics. We know that dogs bark and cats meow. It’s what they do. If you have a dog that meows or a cat that barks, you do not have a dog or a cat; you have a problem. What you have is not real. It’s an absurdity, a monstrosity even. You’re having a dream, maybe a nightmare.

There is no greater nightmare than a disciple of Jesus who does not act like a disciple of Jesus. There is no such thing. Ducks quack, dogs bark, cats meow, and disciples... well, Jesus’ disciples, as He puts it, are the salt of the earth. And because they are the salt of the earth, they will be salty. Jesus’ disciples will salt the earth. It’s what they do. If they don’t, there’s a problem. It’s an absurdity, a monstrosity. It’s not real. There is no such thing. There cannot be a disciple of Jesus who is not salty. Jesus does not say, “You can be the salt of the earth,” or even “You should be the salt of the earth.” He says, “You are... *You are the salt of the earth.*”

Who is He speaking to? Who is the *you* here? It’s you, and it’s me. It’s His disciples, and no one else. His disciples came to Him on the mountain, and He sat down to teach His disciples. “*You,*” He says, “*You alone,*” (and that is the Greek here) “*are the salt of the earth.*”

Why? Why you and why me? Why are we the salt of the earth? Why is this who we are? It’s because you are one who is blessed. “*Blessed are the poor in spirit,*” Jesus begins to teach. “*Blessed are those who mourn... Blessed are the meek... Blessed are you when others revile you...and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.*” The blessed ones are the salt of the earth. And the blessed ones are Jesus’ disciples.

You are the salt of the earth because the earth needs you. Not the trees, flowers, animals, and such things. They need you too. But anyone can care for them. Anyone, not just the disciples of Jesus. It is the people of the earth who need you. They need you to be salty. They need your living witness to Jesus Christ. They need to see and hear your Christian life.

The earth needs to be salted. They need to repent. They need Jesus. And not just those way out there. Those who are near to us. Some are in your own family, and in mine. Only Jesus, through His disciples, can salt them. If we do not salt them, who will? They will not repent on their own. They need us to be salty for them.

Salt seasons, salt preserves. It is of great benefit in these ways. And so are you. Without you in the world, the world would be lacking. Without you in your family, your family would not have the great benefit that you are to them.

This is why you are here. It’s why you are still in the earth. It’s why God has not taken you to heaven yet. You are here as one who is useful to Jesus. While you are here, you are the salt of the earth.

But there are times when you and I do not feel very useful. We may even feel useless. We may see ourselves, as we hear Jesus say of salt that has lost its taste, of being good for nothing except to be trampled underfoot.

We should admit, we need to confess that we have acted in ways not becoming of Jesus' disciples. Have we lost our saltiness? Will God throw us out to be trampled underfoot on Judgment Day? Should we be concerned? Ought we to worry? We should repent. "Lord, I have failed to salt the earth. I have failed with my community, my friends, my own family."

This was Simon Peter when, instead of salting those around him by confessing, "Yes, I am a disciple of Jesus," he denied Him. Was he useful to Jesus? He felt useless, deserving to be thrown out of Jesus' presence and trampled underfoot.

Yet how useful he truly was. Peter serves as a reminder to us that as he fell, so can we, and so do we. And even more, that as Jesus forgave Peter, so He also forgives us.

As much an absurdity as it is for a disciple of Jesus not to be salty, it is even more of an absurdity for God not to be forgiving. Just as there cannot be a disciple of Jesus who has lost his saltiness, so it cannot be that our God has lost His mercy and grace toward sinners like us.

Ducks quack, dogs bark, cats meow, disciples are salty, and God forgives sinners. It's what He does because it's who He is, a merciful God.

The cross of Jesus is proof positive. There is your God hanging from a bloody cross for you. That bloody cross is in your baptism. That bloody cross is in Jesus' body and blood in His Sacrament. These are proof positive, not only that God forgives, but that He forgives you.

You are forgiven by Jesus. You are useful to Jesus. You are the salt of the earth. Amen.