

Salt is good...

And I might add—necessary

Some salt in our diet is essential in addition to the fact that it adds flavor to food

Salt has healing properties—I was just told to rinse with saline following dental work

Salt is so common and cheap that we take it for granted

In addition to seasoning—it was the major form of food preservation in the past

Especially important in preservation of meat before canning and freezers

Evidence of a salt works in Romania and China as early as 6,000 years ago¹

Salt was an important trade commodity in the Middle East

Salt was so essential, yet scarce, that countries sometimes went to war over salt

In India, Britain held a monopoly on the manufacture and sale of salt

They also charged a heavy salt tax when salt was sold

Gandhi's famous salt march was a nonviolent act of civil disobedience

Salt was traded or used for currency in some cases

Even said that salt was traded for gold—weight for weight

They also traded salted meat and fish

Word "salary" comes from Latin "salarium" which refers to salt as pay to soldiers

...but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored?

It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; they throw it away.

Strictly speaking salt cannot lose its saltiness; sodium chloride is a stable compound.

But most salt in the ancient world derived from salt marshes or the like,

rather than by evaporation of salt water, and therefore had many impurities.

The actual salt, being more soluble than the impurities, could be leached out,

leaving a residue so dilute it was of little worth.

Salt was often placed on the ground of a city when conquered as a curse of re-inhabitation

Judges 9:45 - Abimelech razed the city and sowed it with salt

Though done many times, practice seems more symbolic than rendering land unusable

However, salt was often used to reduce vegetation in an area, such as on a road

In modern Israel savorless salt is still said to be scattered on the soil of flat roofs, roads

This helps harden the soil and prevent leaks;

and since the roofs serve as play grounds and places for public gathering,

the salt is still being trodden under foot

On roads or paths, the salt hardens the soil and prevents growth

Spread like we put gravel down

Salt without flavor still had purpose, but not to preserve food or provide flavor to food

But what difference does all this make?

Why does Jesus say that we are to be the salt of the earth?

Why does he warn us about useless salt?

Why does he ask about restoring the saltiness of salt?

Why does he say that useless salt has no value—even on the manure pile?

¹ Most facts about salt were taken from Wikipedia at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salt>

When you think about it, salt is pretty invisible—yet it makes a huge difference
 ...the oatmeal without salt tastes pretty bad
Jesus told us to be the salt of the earth
 —the salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of the earth
 Not necessarily seen and noticed, but making a difference in the world
Salt in the salt shaker isn't worth much—it has to leave the salt shaker to be of value

I wonder if we aren't in danger of becoming useless Christians
Last week we talked about the high cost of following Jesus
If we just go through the motions—we've lost our saltiness
 If we don't set aside our focus on self-preservation—we've lost our saltiness
 Truth is we aren't very good at ensuring our own safety
 It demands everything of us in the effort—with no guarantee in the end
Trusting Jesus and following with radical obedience is costly, yet very salty
We are in Christ and Christ in us

In our greedy world where many seek leadership roles and want recognition for accomplishments,
do we as Christians, and especially as Quakers, aspire to be the salt of the earth?
Do we make a difference because the God within us gives flavor to everything around us?²

As Quakers, we are often proud of our salty past and of a list of things we stand for—peace, simplicity
Being a salty people is more about a radical following of Jesus than it is about specific actions
It is daily saying, "What's next, Jesus?"
It is daily saying to Jesus that I'm ready for whatever is mine to do
Also, in Christ, there can be a restoration of saltiness—of new beginnings and re-creation
As Thomas Kelly says, simply turn and begin again, with no recrimination

In getting ready for this message, I picked up my copy of *"Out of the Salt-shaker & into the World"*³
The book ends with one of my favorite stories about how to be a salty people
In 1970 First Friends moved to a new building and became Reedwood across from Reed College
They began reaching out to the Reed students and offered a Sunday night soup supper
Some attended worship—often coming in their strange clothing
In 1970 Christians generally dressed up for church
A new Christian from Reed, Bill came to church in jeans, t-shirt, no shoes, wild hair
Finding no place to sit, he went down front and sat on the floor
Elderly Wilbur Field in his 3 piece suit, joined him on the floor—Wilbur was a salty Christian

I don't think it was so much what he did that made Wilbur salty—but his willingness to follow
 Costly in getting down and back up again, costly in sitting there
 Costly in what others might think
But it meant that Bill felt welcome that day as Wilbur extended grace and compassion

Do we order our lives so that we can live out this radical willingness to be salty and follow Jesus?
What kind of a salty people are we? Full of flavor or only useful to keep the weeds down?
Jesus changes everything about life—are we even aware of what we have and the difference we make?

² "Does Your Flavor Make a Difference?" by Sandy Davis, *Quaker Life*, March 2003, page 9

³ By Rebecca Manley Pippert