

# “Salted For Service”

Mark 9:50

*(based on a sermon by Pastor Matthew Harrison)*

October 7, 2012

19<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost – LWML Sunday

The president of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Pastor. Matthew Harrison, likes to tell the following story: “Not long ago, my wife and I returned to her hometown. We were stopped at a gas station. As I filled the tank, I noticed she spent a long time speaking to the attendant. When she finally returned to the car, I asked her, ‘Who was that you were talking to?’ She replied that it was an old flame. ‘Oh really?’ I exclaimed with a smirk. ‘He’s a gas station attendant? Imagine if you had married him!’ My wife responded, “Yeah. *He’d* be the president of the Missouri Synod.”

This joke has a profound point. Our wives make us men far better for service to the Lord than we would otherwise be. The LWML (Lutheran Women’s Missionary League) has been a similar blessing for the Missouri Synod. Now, this day and this sermon are not a trite tip-of-the-hat to the LWML organization and praise-fest of its members. We are here to hear the message which the LWML supports and promotes and which all sinners need to hear.

“Salted for Service” is the theme for today. What’s the big deal about salt? What does the Bible say about it? Salt is something good which adds something positive to what it touches. Of course, it seasons food (Job 6:6), but salt also healed bitter water (2 Kings 2:21). Salt also preserves. Salt purified the sacrifices of the Old Testament and indicated peace with God (Lev. 2:13) It indicated kinship and peace between parties (Ezra 4:14), and so Jesus adds in today’s text, “Be at peace with one another.”

Jesus makes us Christians “salty” – something good which adds something positive to what it touches. We are “salted for service”. Jesus has salted us to season everything around us. That is what Christians do. When Jesus says, “If salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty

again?”, He’s simply saying that salt cannot but be salty. There’s no such thing as “unsalty salt”.

Christians are “salty” and we’re salted for service.

How exactly do we get to be salty? Our sinfulness leaves us devoid of any good in ourselves and of any ability to add good to what we touch. But Jesus died to put your sins to death on a cross 9,000 miles away and 2,000 years ago. It’s a done deal. “It is finished!” There is nothing you or anyone on earth can or need to do to gain God’s favor and make ourselves “salty”. “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself...” (2 Cor. 5:19) What He won so long ago, He doles out now. He grabbed you by the neck in Holy Baptism and made His cross, death, and resurrection yours! Your sins are washed away! And to what end? Luther’s Catechism says that He did all of this “so that I may be His own, live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness.”

Today we are not forgiven, not “salted,” to live in sin and long for it, though we all do so and deserve the fate Lot’s wife who was salted in a much different way. We are salted to look forward. We are salted to serve. But how? At the time of Luther, it was thought that church was all about giving God our works and praise and service to earn heaven. It was all Law! In those days, it was believed that the greatest Christians were those who isolated themselves from the rest of the world in monasteries, separated from people, and devoted to God. Church was all about performing the sacrifice of the Mass to gain points for heaven.

But Martin Luther turned the whole thing around. Church is first and foremost about God serving us! We are the tax collector standing off in the corner pleading, “God be merciful to me, a sinner!” God is the One doing something for us – fully and freely forgiving all of our sins – for the sake of Jesus who had said, “I came not to be served but to serve and give my life as a ransom for many.” As Luther so often said, “God does not need your good works. But your neighbor does!” So, served by God in His blessed Word and Sacrament, we are salted to turn to our neighbor in love and serve him or her. And this is precisely what we learn from women of the Bible and the LWML.

The LWML is “salted for the service” of bearing witness to Christ. It exists for this very purpose. Remember the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4? Jesus said, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.” “Give me this water,” she responded to Jesus. But Christ then confronted her about her numerous husbands and current live-in boyfriend. Jesus called her to repentance and faith. And, by the working of the Holy Spirit through the Savior’s words, she believed. After Jesus “salted” her for life eternal, what did she do? She immediately bore witness to Jesus. John 4:28 says, “So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, ‘Come see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?’” And in verse 39, we read, “Many Samaritans believed in Him *because of the woman’s witness.*”

The Church in all of its members bears witness to Jesus! As we read the Bible, we can see ourselves in all of its characters. *You* are the woman at the well! *You* are the one whose life does not square up with the demands of the Law. *You* deserve hell! *You* are the one whom Jesus calls to repentance! *You* are the one forgiven! *You* are the one who now bears witness to Jesus! *You* are salted to service no matter who you are! *You* are a “royal priest,” says the Bible, “that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” (1 Peter 2:9)

But where is that service to take place? The work of the LWML shows us exactly where. Your witness takes place *where God has put you* – first and foremost in your family. You are witness to your children and your grandchildren. You are witness to your parents and to your siblings. That’s why the LWML provides so many resources and Bible studies – so that you can start at home! And from there, your witness spreads to your circle of friends, this congregation, this community – just like the woman at the well.

Through the mites – the offering collected by the women of the LWML in tiny mite boxes – hundreds and hundreds of projects in our districts, in the Synod, in our partner churches, and all

around the globe have been funded – including one that will be funded right here with Christ Lutheran Church for the Deaf – so that the Good News of free forgiveness and new life in Jesus is shared everywhere. In fact, the worldwide witness of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod would be severely hindered without the LWML. Countless thousands know Jesus and will live forever because of the work of the LWML. Now, that's salty service indeed!

But there's more. The LWML is not an organization that is so heavenly minded that it is no earthly good. The women of the LWML are also "salted for the service" of being missionaries of mercy! Jesus came to have mercy, and to have mercy on both body and soul. Jesus cared for people in physical need, over and over again. The New Testament teaches repeatedly that the Church is to care for the needy its midst and also to reach out to others in physical need. That is the teaching of Martin Luther. That is the teaching of Dr. C.F.W. Walther, the founder of the Missouri Synod. And it is the marvelous "salty" practice of the LWML!

Pastor Matt Harrison, president of the Missouri Synod, who, before that, was president of LCMS World Relief and Human Care, tells about seeing this all over the world. He says, "Over the past decade, I've visited dozens and dozens of places in the world and had recurring experiences – like I did, for example, in Ambur, India. There I was touring a large and bustling Lutheran hospital compound. Hundreds of people are treated there daily – babies are born and people are cared for by pastors and deaconesses and doctors. As I rounded a corner on the walk, I came face-to-face with something profound. A plaque on the hospital building stated, 'Built with assistance of funds from the Lutheran Women's Missionary League.'" Every time this occurs I think of all the women I've met from the LWML over the years. I think of all those faithfully-filled Mite Boxes. I think especially of the women now with the Lord. And I'm profoundly thankful."

It would take literally all day to tell you about current LWML projects around the District, the United States, and the world that are caring for the poorest women and children, fighting malaria and other diseases, assisting the addicted, providing care for unwed mothers and their children,

supporting crisis pregnancy centers, and many more. The bulletin board in the east hallway can give you a small taste of everything going on and I'd encourage you to stop and take a look today. Jesus is being shared with those in need, caring for their bodies and their souls.

There's still more. Don't you find it interesting that Jesus says in our text, "have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another"? Being "salt" brings with it a "life together" in the church. St. John wrote, "...that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete" (1 John 1:3-4) John's witness to Jesus created faith and fellowship and joy. As the LWML bears witness to Jesus, precisely the same thing happens here in this place. Our life together is deepened. The LWML helps us share each other's burdens in the service it performs in our congregation. It strengthens our fellowship, our life together in Jesus. That fellowship, where we share faith and hope and love, continues to grow. And there is joy – *especially* in service.

Finally, the LWML is an example for all of us. We are all "salted to serve" – women and men, young and old, everyone. How do we serve? Forgiven by Jesus, we bear witness to him wherever God places us. We care for those in need, just as He did. And we live a life together of love and forgiveness. And in all this service, through every joy and sorrow shared, there is joy. It's no wonder the LWML's motto is Psalm 100:2, "Serve the Lord with *gladness!* May God bless all the women of the LWML and the entire Church on earth with such salty service! Amen.