

September 30, 2018 • 19th Sunday in Kingdomtide

“We Are Salt: Reflections from our 2018 Youth Service Project Team”

Sermon by Rev. Patricia Farris, Natalia Quintana, Dan Stirling



Mark 9:38-41, 49-50

John said to him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.” But Jesus said, “Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us. For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.”

“For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”

Rev. Patricia Farris

Today after worship, we have the opportunity to hear from and be inspired by our 2018 Youth Service Project Team. We thought it would be fun to give you a preview by hearing from a team member and counselor, so Natalia and Dan are joining me in the sermon time this morning.

I want to provide a Scripture framework for their report by reflecting on those intriguing words we hear from Jesus today: “Salt is good, but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”

In another place, Jesus says to his disciples: You are the salt of the earth. You are the salt of this earth, the salt for the land, salt for the whole of humankind, other translators put it.

What is he telling us about who we really are? What is he telling us about the transformation God is working in us? What is he teaching us about our transforming presence in the world? How are our team members “salt” for the earth and for God’s people?

In these days of low sodium everything, it’s important to remember the value and importance of salt in Jesus’ time. Salt was a precious commodity. Salt was meted out for pay—hence our world “salary” from the Latin *salarium*.

Salt was used to enhance the taste of food and to preserve food. Friendships were sealed by tasting salt together. Salt was rubbed on newborn babies for medicinal and cleansing purposes. Bakers know that salt is one of the four essential ingredients of bread, along with flour, water, and yeast. Salt regulates yeast activity. Salt actually makes the dough stronger and less sticky. Essential to the baking of bread, salt “gives its life,” as it were, to make the dough strong and become a rich and beautiful and life-giving loaf of bread. Like dough, we all need salt to live.

So, when Jesus used salt as a descriptor for his disciples, all these meanings and properties of salt would have come to mind: seasoning, preserving, enhancing, cleansing, heralding friendships, conferring value, giving life.

We know that our YSP Teams are truly salt. They have this Christ-like salt in themselves. They give of themselves to bring life to others. They season their work with salty blood, sweat and tears. They are precious children of God, disciples of Christ Jesus, whose saltiness witnesses through what they say and do. They make this world more beautiful and flavorful and holy through their passion and their joy. They transform places and lives, and in the process, they themselves are transformed as well.

Let’s hear them now in their own words. Listen carefully—as they speak, I think we’ll hear how they become salt for the world.

Thanks be to God for these amazing salty disciples!

Natalia Quintana

Good morning. I’m Natalia Quintana. I’m in 10th grade, and this trip was my second service trip. We went to Slidell, Louisiana to work with the Epworth Project. I was on Emily and Jen’s work team and our team went to work on our homeowner, Alma’s house. Our job was to mainly do tile work. That included measuring and cutting tiles, mixing and laying mud, placing tiles, grouting, and sealing. I learned a lot of new skills on the work site. Basically everything we did was new to me. I had never mixed mud or grout, or done anything with tile. Everyday was a new experience, trying to see what things had to get done, and what new skills we needed to learn. We struggled and made mistakes, and had to work around them, like mixing thick mud, and having to make a new batch much earlier than we wanted.

We had a goal of not only completing the living room, but doing the hallway, and a bedroom. The hallway was a struggle. It was at an angle, meaning every piece had to be perfectly measured and cut. I was given the job of having to make templates for

those pieces. Our site leader and I spent hours working out a way to outline the odd shape of the doorway and finding exactly what the perfect shape would be, down to the millimeters. Meanwhile, the other members of our team worked on doing the demo of the old flooring in the bedroom.

With it being so hot, we often had to take breaks and sit in the living room where there was air conditioning. That gave us a lot of time to get to know Alma. Her husband had just had a stroke and she was taking care of him, but she was always trying to help. We actually had to tell her not to. She helped us do the grout in the living room, even when we didn't want her to, and after we left for the night she sealed the tiles.

One moment in particular stood out to me. We were clearing all the furniture out of the bedroom, and we noticed some photo albums. We called Alma in and she went through the photos. She talked about her family, showed us photos of her as a kid, and even went out of her way to go through all of the pictures. The entire team just listened to her talk, and I think it motivated us even more than before. She was so sweet to us. She bought us snacks, and insisted on making us lunch. I talked to her a lot. She was fun and sweet, and even made me serenade her with musical theatre so she could post it on Facebook.

This trip was meaningful. We saw the aftermath of Katrina, and the poverty of the area, but also the happiness and hope of the people there. I learned so much, not only about myself, but about the way that people have been able to overcome all the things that were thrown at them. The community in Slidell and New Orleans, is a community of people with so much grit and determination, but also hope. They were so kind and caring and grateful. The people I met and the work I was able to do has changed me for the better, and I will never forget it.

Dan Stirling

Households in many countries around the world have an old tradition of a 'perpetual stew'. It's a pot that sits on the hearth at a low simmer into which various ingredients are added but which never gets completely emptied and cleaned. Some households have supposedly had pots going for centuries. The taste comes mostly from the newly added ingredients, but the flavor of what was already there infuses and creates a uniquely flavored meal. In fact, a few high-end restaurants are famous for their back-burner stews, using them as an always-changing flavoring for their signature dishes.

When Patricia asked me to help her to supplement her sermon today, and provided me with the verses you heard from the book of Mark, the idea of the 'perpetual stew' came to mind. Every year the senior high youth venture out with a few counselors to help others; to touch and add flavor to the lives of others; and to receive some flavoring of their own. We have veteran counselors who have been in the stew pot for a loooooong time. We have counselors and older youth who have been in the stew pot for a while, perhaps a few years. We have some who went a year ago for the first time. And we have the fresh ones, going on their first service trip this year. And along with all of that is the residual seasoning of all those who have gone before.

A youth going on the service project for his or her first time is probably younger, probably less connected to this group, less skilled with tools and home repair than one returning with experience. They are raw and fresh, but lack seasoning. As the trip progresses we all get to know each other better, share personal stories and dental floss, share new experiences and meet new people, and learn new skills.

On Saturday, after the week's work was complete, we went on a swamp tour in Slidell. As we were waiting before the tour I struck up a conversation with a gentleman, who although I didn't know it at the time was slated to be our tour guide. I told him about the work we had done and the power tools we used, chop saws, Skilsaws, a gas-powered auger hole digger. "Of course the adults were the only ones using the power tools," he said. No, the kids did too, even the smallest holding a handle on the auger. And they did so tentatively at first, then with the confidence of understanding that they could use this powerful tool, safely, and that it wasn't a big deal.

Each trip is a unique experience for me. Each year has a different set of faces, some new and some not. Each work crew is different from all the others. And the change in each person between leaving town on Saturday and returning the next weekend is nothing short of amazing. We have each been salted with new experiences, new memories, new friendships. And we are much richer for it.