

From the PA's Desk

**Scripture Today:**

Mahatma Gandhi once told a Christian friend, "I like your Christ, but I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ." In a similar vein, the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche once said that if he saw more redeemed people he might be more inclined to believe in their Redeemer.

What a sobering reflection of the witness of the church and us Christians! Neither Gandhi nor Nietzsche saw enough believers' lights shining to convince them that the gospel message really does have the power to change people's lives.

That's the challenge of today's Gospel reading: to show the joy, the love, and the peace of Jesus to people like Gandhi and Nietzsche. It's the challenge for each of us to live like "our Christ" and to show the world just how distinctive and fulfilling a redeemed life can be. In a very real way, our credibility—as well as the credibility of Jesus' message—is on the line every single day. And a credibility gap hinders our ability to help other people come to embrace Jesus in their hearts.

Regarding the imagery of today's Gospel reading, if one visits Israel today, especially on the road north from Jerusalem, one notices clay-ovens next to some houses along the roadside. Many prefer to cook in these outdoor ovens rather than on electric or propane gas stoves. Ovens like these have been around since ancient times. In the biblical period of today's Gospel, each village had a common oven. Since villagers were often members of a very large, extended family, these common ovens were family ovens. The common fuel for the oven was something that was more plentiful than wood: camel or donkey dung. The dung was mixed with salt and left in the sun to dry. A slab of salt was placed at the base of the oven and upon it the salted dung patty. The point of this "more information than I needed to know story" is to make the point that salt was used as fuel. Salt has catalytic properties which cause the dung patty to burn. Eventually the salt slab loses its catalytic ability and becomes useless. Or as Jesus says, "It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot", where it can still provide a sure footing in a muddy road.

This is perhaps a different cultural imagery than the one we normally hear about salt, but probably the meaning Jesus had in mind when he says: "You are the salt of the earth." In other words, "You disciples, as the salt and catalyst for the earth-oven, are the ones who keep the fire burning and you can make things happen." If Jesus disciples do this, they will also be "the light of the world." These two images so masterfully joined together show Jesus to be a clever and imaginative teacher. The point of the message is also sobering. If we, as disciples of Jesus do not keep the fire of God's visible to all, who will do it?

For those of you that prefer the less graphic image of salt than the one offered above, let me end by saying there are literally thousands of uses for salt, but by itself it is useless. That image in itself speaks volumes about salt-less Christians.

**Alpha:**

If you are looking for a way to deepen your relationship with Jesus Christ, or seeking to re-ignite the fire of that relationship into something visible for others to see, please consider joining us for our Lenten and Easter Season ALPHA program. Information is available at the back of church, or contact AlphaUSA.org A schedule of our topics and dates are on the back.