

Many live daily with fear, frustration, and anger. It could be related to jobs, illness, family, money, parenting, or death. And situations such as this can lead to a real spiritual crisis – a crisis of faith. We all know what we believe, but when our belief doesn't change the world around us, we can be overwhelmed by anger, fears, or crisis. And a spiritual crisis can season how we live with tastes that range from sour to bitter. We also know the world we live in is God's gift. That his love is so powerful he embraced our flesh in the person of Jesus, erased the debt of sin, and conquered the darkness of death. His gifts are undeserved and full of love. Is the seasoning of that love enough to overwhelm our occasional or chronic crises of faith? In other words, are we changed by the world around us, or changed by the blessings of God? What is the flavor of your day? What does life taste like? What seasons your living?

Daily we face choices: Shall we live by FAITH or complain about FATE! Will we REACH OUT in love or WAIT for our comfort level to rise? Do we CELEBRATE CHRIST or SURRENDER and allow culture to dictate how we live? Last week one of our members wondered if the Catholic Church would survive all the stories of abuse by priests? We discussed how this is one of the current "flavors of the day," especially when it pertains to people, political parties, or institutions that are out of favor – such seasoning sells, and it is familiar to those who are angry, bitter, and wanting to control what they cannot control.

We also discussed how this is nothing new. There are instances of abuse in every denomination. There are instances of greed and selfishness in every community. There is hatred and prejudice in every nation. And if we want to focus on what is broken, and nothing else, we will never be freed from the spiritual diseases that sin brings. How do we live in a world overwhelmed with anxiety? What can we share when we have many of the same frailties? How can faith overcome our shortcomings, anger, and fear? What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus in a world that rejects him in so many ways?

*Ecclesiastes reminds, "There is nothing new under the sun." Life has always been complicated, even for those who were willing to stand up and be bold in their faith. Numbers relates how 70 elders were given responsibility to help Moses but complained because others dared to help as well. Even Jesus' disciples were jealous when "outsiders" dared carry out the work that was so special for them. God's response, whether from the prophets or from Jesus is consistent: "Wouldn't it be great if ALL were prophets? Anyone who isn't against us is with us!" What a simple and yet remarkable gift God's love is. His love doesn't come in different levels or flavors; it is the same for all. It isn't based on any inside track; it is pure, unadulterated grace.*

When I barbecue, I often use a combination of spices and rub them on the meat before putting it on the grill. Combining the seasoning with heat changes the flavor and usefulness of what goes on the grill. Seasons change the flavor of whatever they touch. And for people of faith, our challenge is to let the seasoning of Jesus' love change the flavor of how we live! Jesus used a wonderful metaphor in the image of being "salted with fire." Salt was a most valuable commodity because of how it was used. It changed the flavor of everything it touched. It preserved meat and kept it from spoiling. But if not used or cared for properly salt is wasted, ruined, and has no value. It is no different for discipleship and faith, which change anything they touch, but are wasted if they not used.

When you add the image of fire (with its destructive nature that changes everything it

touches) the metaphor of being "salted with fire" brings an even more powerful image. Whatever we face in life, whether as welcome as salt or destructive as fire does indeed change us, but in faith, every moment "seasons us for service!"

*Israel hated the desert, but forty years of serpents and sand dunes seasoned them for a lifetime with God. Disciples didn't always appreciate Jesus' classroom lessons but were seasoned for the work that lay ahead. We often are disturbed by trials and tribulations, but faith flavors those moments and gives them value for what comes next. This is the spiritual seasoning that Jesus promised. And it alone can change the flavor of each day.*

Life can be a series of spiritual crises, or a life seasoned by the miracles of God. Do we curse the darkness or light candles? How often do we find reasons to wait for conditions to be just right and complain when they don't suit our fancy? When we stop to listen and open our eyes to see, we are reminded that God's love changes everything. And whether good or bad, deserved or not, the gift of faith, like salt or fire, makes everything it touches into something blessed and new.

We can complain about the brokenness of life or celebrate that Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are stronger seasonings than human traditions or attempts to explain God. Each has the potential of faith, but if it is rejected that is no different than pouring water on salt and complaining that it has lost its taste.

One never knows the results of faith, and yet such seasoning is like planting seeds. Remember what the Psalm writer proclaimed: "This is day Lord has made! Rejoice and be glad!" What are we waiting for? Why would we complain? It is simply time to become what God has seasoned and freed us to be!

What if God had waited for a better day, or less difficult conditions to be born in a manger? And yes, sometimes disciples were immature and selfish, yet Jesus never gave up on them. God always moves forward and reaches out – there are always second chances and always the gift of life with God. A manger, a cross, and an empty tomb season us and the world. And they touch every moment, blessing, disappointment and hope with the gift of grace and undeserved love.

So then, what does that mean for HOW we live? Do we complain or celebrate? Curse the darkness or lift the light of Christ's love. Think of what it means for YOU, at school, at the voting booth, at work, at play, with your children or your parents to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. For that is what God has seasoned YOU to be!

When Abby was 5, she came to the door with one of those flags you put on the back of a bicycle or trailer, so someone sees it from behind. She asked me to put it in our front yard. I asked her why, and she said, "To remind us of Jesus." Now that didn't make any sense, but I did it, and every time I saw it, guess what, "I thought about Jesus."

Who are people who have "seasoned" your life? Who touched you with Jesus' love – did it matter who or how??? OK, then, who now is God calling you to "season" or "light up?" When life ISN'T fair what will you do – complain or be seasoned? When life IS fair what will you do – take it for granted or celebrate LIGHT? Don't waste your gifts or your opportunities. "Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with each other." Yes, you!