

# Grace Abounds in Impact

## Mark 9:38-50

### Introduction

Many of you are aware that one of our local cardiologists, Dr. Surender Neravetla, is widely recognized as one of "America's Top Surgeons." So highly regarded is his skill that he is one of the very few doctors in the region to be authorized to work on the President of the United States.

Through a variety of circumstances and an enormous amount of study, Dr. Neravetla has concluded that salt is the leading cause of heart disease. Not genetics. Not fat. Not stress. Salt ... and he believes it needs to be totally eliminated from our diets. He has published this as a book, which he freely hands out to anyone who comes to his office. The book's title: *Salt Kills*.

So when I read these words in today's Gospel text, it was only natural that I thought about Dr. Neravetla and his book:

Salt is good ... (Luke 9:50)

Salt has been around for a long time.

- Salt was used in Old Testament days to establish a covenant.
- Because salt symbolizes purity and as a preservative, it communicates how impacted by the Christian message.
- Interestingly, the Old Testament Jews were not allowed to put yeast or honey on their sacrifices, but they were required to use salt (Lev. 2:11, 13).
- Our salt today is chemically modified so that it does not lose its taste; but Old Testament salt didn't have the benefits of modern science so it would quickly lose its flavor.

The ability to lose its salty flavor is the story behind what Jesus says here in the text:

Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? (Luke 9:50)

Perhaps you are more familiar with the way Matthew records this teaching in His gospel:

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. (Matthew 5:13)

So on the one hand we have Dr. Neravetla saying "salt kills" and on the other hand we have Scripture teaching us that "salt is good." Let me bring these two divergent perspectives together for us this morning like this:

Don't EAT salt ... BE salt!

Salt makes a difference in everything it touches. When it's not there, you know it. A skillful cook like my wife can taste the food she has prepared for our supper and say "This needs more salt." I can taste the same food and think "Something's not right." I have no clue what it is, and I would never say that out loud, but in the tasting I know something is missing.

And likewise because we Christians – we the church – are the salt of the earth, we know two things should most certainly be true:

1. We make difference wherever we go.
2. We ought to be missed if we are not there.

Throughout this month of September we have focused our attention on the amazing truth that God's Grace Abounds in and through the ministries of this church – to the extent that we are able to rejoice that Grace Church Abounds as well. We have seen it expressed in three ways so far this month. Grace Abounds:

- In the young people of our church.
- In our commitment to the Great Commission's call to make disciples.
- And in the abundance of musical giftedness in this family of faith.

Today we remind ourselves that Grace Abounds as we make a difference in the lives of people and in the communities in which we live and serve. God's Grace Abounds in our Impact.

Now, buckle your seat belts. I'm about to take you for a ride and tell you some things you may not know. Look around. Grace Abounds in Its Impact. You see it in:

- Our livestreamed worship services. Before this week is up hundreds of people will watch this service, many of whom have no other church home than this one.
  - Some cannot attend their churches because they are homebound
  - A couple of them are military families continuing to worship with their home church (us) despite being deployed at far ends of the country.
  - Some are slowly finding their way back to matters of faith and this is a safe re-entry point
  - Some are active in their own churches, but find we do here ministers to them at a deeper level.
- The lives of the young people who led worship here three weeks ago, and in the way they have touched the people of Racine WI, Madison WV, Green Bay WI, Uniontown, PA and Imperial PA.
  - This coming summer they are headed to Port Huron, MI next year.
- Adult mission trips to Belize and soon to be in Big Laurel KY, and more to come as we work on the possibility of Haiti in the first half of next year.
- Our efforts at Snowhill, providing supplies for teachers, mentoring for students, winter coats, Christmas gifts and prayer support.

- Our ministry at Springfield Manor – something we started more than five years ago, and now see the rest of the community catching up.
- At least 20 different groups that meet here regularly during the course of a year – as varied as: AA, Grief Support, Support for the Survivors of Suicide, Cub Scouts, Girl Scouts, Ohio Agribusiness Council, Springfield Wildcat Club, area track officials, ReviveOhio, Mission Increase, Hospice and more – all at no cost to them.
  - We even host the negotiations between Oesterlen and its union whenever their contract is up
- Our ministry to the other NALC churches in the Southwest Ohio Mission District, training them in discipleship and council leadership and other such leadership topics.
- Area Outreach ministries know they are welcome here anytime.
  - A few hold their annual leadership planning sessions here.
  - Sometimes the Executive Director will hang out for an afternoon to pray and think away from the noise of his/her own office.
  - Since we opened the two new wings in October 2014, we have hosted more than 100 fundraising events for these groups, many of which were catered by our Table of Grace team.
  - That team has served nearly 25,000 meals to prospective donors at these fundraising banquets.
- Currently this congregation is leading the way in community efforts to bring LifeWise Academy into the Springfield City Schools.
- We are also leading the way to bring a revival movement to our community within the next year. Just this past week, we once again hosted the team from ReviveOhio.
- We were the first church in the NALC to enter and complete the Navigator discipleship training, and we have mentored about a dozen other congregations along the way.
- We have trained one pastoral intern, Dan Mershon, who is faithfully serving our NALC congregation in West Alexandria, and we believe that another intern will arrive in January.
- On top of that there have been countless weddings, funerals, baptisms, graduation parties, baby showers, and bridal showers.
- Here at Grace you have been faithfully fed the truth of God's Word for 106 years.
  - You have experienced the blessing of the Sacraments.
  - You have known the joy of corporate worship.

- You have developed key friendships and relationships that have rejoiced with you in your times of great happiness and sustained you through the dark times as well.

And that is just a sampling. We don't have time for me to give you a complete list.

You know, our good friend Wally Martinson brings a group of about 40 different ministries from all across the state of Ohio together four times a year. These ministries meet with Wally in our fellowship hall because – in Wally's words – it is the perfect training environment for what he wants to accomplish in his Mission Increase ministry.

- Over the past two years, Wally has asked me to open those training times with prayer. He also invites me to share briefly with those 40 or so ministries what we do here and why we do it.
- So I tell them a very, very condensed version of what I've just told you, and I invite them here to experience it for themselves. That's the "what" part.
- The "why" part goes like this: "As a church we have come to the inescapable conclusion that everything we have belongs to God. He has been given to us so that we might make the biggest possible impact for His Kingdom. He keeps giving, and we are doing our best to keep up."

And we are not done. We have big dreams about where we believe God is leading this church in the future. Let me share one of my favorite parts of that dream:

- By this time next year, the field behind us will feature a half-mile walking path used by you and by the families of the surrounding neighborhoods.
  - It will have a play area for neighborhood children.
  - There will be prayer stations at strategic points around it, including one at the cross at the back of the property
  - And right in the middle of it will be youth soccer fields where this congregation will operate a faith-based ministry that meets the physical, social and spiritual needs of the children who right now are playing on the asphalt outside my office window.

## **APPLICATION**

Our goal is not to EAT salt. We want to BE salt. And as God's Grace Abounds, we are doing just that.

In just a few moments as you bring your Estimate of Giving cards to the altar along with your Time and Talent forms and your offerings for the day, you will be responding to God's Abounding Grace and enabling this congregation to be much needed salt to the places where we live and serve.

Amen.