

## Sunday Thought

26th September 2021 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

### Readings

Esther 7: 1 – 6, 9 – 10 9:20 – 22

Psalm 124

James 5: 13 – 20

Mark 9: 38 – 50

### Salty Church



A variety of thoughts arise from today's scriptures. One leapt out at me which links many of them. It was the words of Jesus – *Have the salt of friendship among you and live at peace with one another.*

The reading from the book of Esther is just enough to draw attention to the whole story which is a good read and will not take very long. Sadly, it comes to life today, illustrated by recent events in the ancient realm of Persia, which stretched from India to Sudan and today embraces modern Iran and part of Afghanistan. It is not difficult therefore to visualise the story's background of warfare and racial conflict. Esther and her uncle Mordecai were among the Jewish people exiled to servitude in Persia. Theirs is a story of deep racial loyalty and salty family friendship in which Esther, whom Mordecai believes has *'come to the kingdom for such a time as this'*, courageously saves her people from genocide.

In the Bible, salt was used in some sacrifices to seal a covenant relationship or a friendship because it was accepted as essential to human life, especially in the absence of refrigeration! Many wars have been fought over possession of salt lands and many family dynasties have prospered by its collection and marketing – in our own country too. Many of us will have familiar memories of salt being used as a preservative. I recall visiting remote farm dwellings where the dominant aroma was the characteristic salting ham. Used sparingly, salt gives flavour to our food and has always been a cleansing and healing agent.

James certainly saw salt in that way and took Jesus' words to heart. He believes *salty friendship* to be the basis of Christian fellowship. Within a church the members share a covenant of friendship together with the greatest friend, Jesus. James describes that fellowship. *'If any one of you is in trouble'*, he writes, *'pray for them, and if they are happy, sing along with them. When there is sickness, pray and care for one another; be open and generous together with forgiveness and careful, helpful advice to keep in the straight and narrow path of holiness.* Friendship is like purifying salt in its fellowship influence. I am sure, like me, many have been encouraged by the example of others in the church fellowship. All this is what friendship together in Christ means. We should value it highly.

Jesus was aware that it would not always be like that. James has already shown us that in his letter. Salt, Jesus reminded his disciples, can sometimes lose its



saltiness! It becomes corrupt. The salt which Jesus knew would mostly come from the marshes around the Dead Sea. There was also rock salt at the south-west end of the Sea (some of Lot's wife?). It seems that the upper layers of that salt were subject to chemical changes and needed to be discarded to reach deeper to the 'real thing.'

Similarly, in some way, the salt of friendship may become inferior, change, or be spoiled and need discarding. Perhaps we should keep working at our Christian friendships in the fellowship too – renewing and strengthening them.

Best of all, of course, is the salt of friendship which Jesus offers each of us. It is that saltiness which binds each of us to him and so to each other. Among his last words to his disciples Jesus assured them '*you are my friends*'. That is an amazing thought to leave with us. Like Abraham, each of us may be called a friend of God. Our friendship together in Jesus, as James says, is about his caring, healing, forgiving, tending of us in faith and love ..

One more thought. Jesus also said in his teaching, which Matthew collected together and we often call '*The Sermon on the Mount*', '*You are the salt of the earth*'. Could that be a challenge to pray and live and work as Jesus' Friends together until the whole world knows the salt of friendship and finds its peace?

A Prayer [with Psalm 124 in mind]

Lord, we praise you for assuring us we are not alone.  
We share in the salty fellowship of friends,  
where there is help and healing,  
with mutual care and growth in faith  
as we work together  
to share your friendship with the whole world.



We praise you for the knowledge we are not alone.  
When we face the battles of living  
– doubts, temptations, sorrows, disasters,  
we have the support of your friendship.

May we give greater value to friendship with You and with all your people,  
working together for a world of peace.