A woman named Ermal, the church gossip and finger-shaker, kept sticking her nose into other people’s business. Most of the time, members of the church were too fearful of her gossip to stand up to her.

She made a mistake, however, when she accused David, a newer member, of being an alcoholic after she saw his minivan parked in front of the town’s only bar one afternoon. She emphatically told David and several others that everyone seeing it there would know what he was doing. David was a man of few words and he stared at her for a long moment before he just turned and walked away. He didn’t explain, defend or deny. He said nothing.

Later that evening, David quietly parked his minivan in front of Ermal’s house .. walked home … and left it there all night.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Church drama can be infectious. Gossip can be contagious. And they are both in direct opposition to Jesus’s demand of complete and total love. When we ignore, counteract, or actively rebel against the all encompassing love of Christ, consequences can be severe, bringing on judgment from God.[[2]](#endnote-2)

According to the Very Rev. Ian Markham, dean of Virginia Theological Seminary, “the way judgment works in the Christian tradition is that when we opt to deny love and feed egoism, selfishness and cruelty, we create an ugly prison for ourselves, one that is quite literally tantamount to hell.[[3]](#endnote-3)

We all seem to have some part of us that looks at, goes to, touches or speaks about things we shouldn’t. That’s the human condition – we try, but we sometimes miss the mark. These actions are born out of emotions such as those Dr. Markham describes – egoism, selfishness, cruelty, but also jealousy and pride. When we let these emotions get the better of us we act in ways that alienate friends and family and put us in a bad place where we find it difficult to feel God’s love (even though that love is there) and we find it difficult to feel the love others have for us. When we let these emotions get the better of us, we put ourselves into a prison of negativity that feeds these emotions more and more, making escape from this dark place difficult. Our egoism or jealousy continues to keep us locked up, away from all the good things God intends for us. We lose some of our flavor for life.

Most of us then want to walk out of this prison. How do we walk out? We escape this prison by becoming what Jesus refers to as “salt.”

Salt was easily available to those in Jesus’s day, found in the Dead Sea and at Mount Sodom. In those days before modern refrigeration, it was key to life because it preserved and purified meat and fish, as well as providing flavor.[[4]](#endnote-4) Salt also was important to Jews in their worship of God because the Mosaic Law called for all sacrifices to be offered with salt.[[5]](#endnote-5)

For us to become salt means for us to first offer ourselves up to God as a sacrifice – that means all that we are and all that we have we offer to God. When we make that offering and mean it, Jesus helps to refine us – helps to purge that jealousy, or egoism, or pride from our hearts. Then we can become that substance that helps to purify the world, we can become the salt that helps to preserve relationships rather than destroy them, we can regain our flavor for life. We can become the person who gives to others without expectation of reward. We can become that person who is genuinely glad for the good fortunes of others, even if we are having a hard time. We become that special person who adds a dash of good flavor to every situation.

Now, it would be nice to say that once we offer ourselves totally to God – whether in baptism or confirmation or in personal prayer time – that we stay salty and never again let our emotions lead our hands, eyes, tongue or feet into the wrong place. But, for most of us, the Christian journey is cyclical. We have those times when we let one of those negative emotions begin to take over. When we do this, we repent, offering ourselves up again in sacrifice to Jesus, and allowing Jesus to make us “salty” again. The key is that as we live our lives, we try spend as much time as possible in prayer and worship so that we are daily and weekly renewing our promise to turn our lives over in sacrifice to Him. We try to spend more and more of our time as salt and less of our time in that bland prison of negativity. As individual Christians we become the pleasant flavor to those around us, the purifier and preserver of all that is good. When we as individual shakers of salt all join together in Christian community, we become a major force of good flavor for the world, united in love for each other and for everyone.

G.K. Chesterton, a lay theologian of the 19th and early 20th century, wrote: “We do not want, as the newspapers say, a church that will move with the world. We want a church that will move the world.”[[6]](#endnote-6)

If we stay committed to Jesus, Jesus will keep us salty. A salty church, moves the world.

1. Ian Markham and Samantha R.E. Gottlich in Lectionary Levity: The Use of Humor in Preaching (Church Publishing: 2017) pp 166 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Markham and. Gottlich p 166 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Markham and. Gottlich p 165 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Malina, B. J., & Rohrbaugh, R. L. (2003). Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels (Second Edition, pp. 354–355). Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Synthesis,. A Weekly Resource for Preaching and Worship in the Episcopal Tradition, PNMSI Publishing Co., Inc**.,** September 2018 [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. G.K. Chesterton, quoted in The New Witness. Christianity Today, Vol. 30 no. 8, found on preachingtoday.com. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)