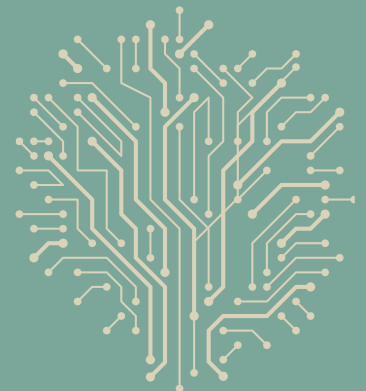


# Talking about Satt!

Challenging conversations for the  
Christian community.



**SALT BUSH**

UNITING THE SCATTERED COMMUNITY



Talking about Salt is produced by Saltbush as part of the work of the NSW & ACT Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia.

[saltbush@nswact.uca.org.au](mailto:saltbush@nswact.uca.org.au)

<https://saltbushcommunity.uca.org.au/>

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Editors: Mark Faulkner  
Geoff Wellington  
Tim Jensen  
Monique Potter

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# Talking about Satt!

## Introduction and guide!

### **Conversation One – A brief history of salt!**

What is salt, where does it come from, and what did salt mean in the days of Jesus?

### **Conversation Two – Is salt necessary for life?**

Salty communities of faith! What gives Christian communities flavour and what erodes the flavour of a salty people?

### **Conversation Three – How salty are you?**

Personal perspectives on faith and saltiness in a different world. Can you and your church still be flavoursome?

### **Conversation Four – The future of being salty!**

What lies ahead when we choose to be salty?

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### **Conversation Five – Salt mining!** (Next steps if you choose)

Adding salt to the water, flavour to the taste and action to the salt mining! What have you heard about how you gather (your life) and how you live out your saltiness (your witness)?

# Introduction and guide!

## Talking about Salt!

It was always going to be a curious thing to suggest, as perhaps Jesus did, that salt could lose its taste or saltiness<sup>1</sup>. Perhaps this is a reference to market salt that was cut down before sale so the salt component was lessened, but the reality is that salt is just that - salt, or something else. Salt can't lose its saltiness; it just is or it isn't.



Perhaps that is the point as we come to Talking about Salt! Are we pretending to be something that we are not! Are we salty, tasty, flavoursome and healing or are we not what we say or think we are! Are we salt!?

These are difficult questions and there are challenging conversations to be had for Christian communities who want to be as salt within the communities in which we find ourselves. And so, you are invited to begin... **Talking about Salt!**

Saltbush as a movement seeks to encourage and connect Uniting Christian communities throughout the land and to reaffirm the life of Christian communities within the wider community in which we find ourselves. To do this however, every corner of the church needs to honestly discuss and ponder the reality that we live in a different world and society from what we once knew and as such we have to choose if we want to be relevant, life giving and... salty! This is true if you are 20 years old or 80 years old... our world has changed.

***"If you have a new world, you need a new church. You have a new world!"***<sup>2</sup>

It's hard to imagine what we can't see and be what we don't know. It's hard to do new things when the old things are comfortable. It's hard to find reasons to change when it's easier to find reasons not to change. But for the church, in our 21st. Century society, as Christian communities, we will have to ask ourselves how relevant and hospitable we want to be and ultimately if we are willing to be as salty as we say.

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 5: 13, Mark 9: 50, Luke 14: 35.

<sup>2</sup> Reggie McNeal



Talking about Salt is not to be yet another meeting and it's not mission planning out of a box. Talking about Salt is not a course, a project, a bible study or a workbook, but simply an invitation to have some challenging and discerning conversations with others around you about who you are, how you gather and who you want to be as a Christian community.

If you don't want to change then you don't need to be Talking about Salt, but if you do want to take a risk and have a challenging conversation because you are the salt of the earth, then perhaps Talking about Salt is for you!

## The nitty gritty of Talking about Salt!

Each conversation has a theme and you are encouraged to lead yourselves through the conversations one by one. You don't need a professional to lead you through, you just need honesty and a willingness to ponder both the present and the future. Remember, lasting change comes from relationships that are built on honest reflection and a passion towards living out what we believe.

You also will want to draw into your conversations the presence of Christ and a sense that Christian community is, like the first gatherings of Christians, the expression of the way of Christ. Each conversation invites this of you too and you are encouraged to see this Christian discernment as vital to the way you shape the present future.

We would also suggest that you include in your conversations a genuine act of hospitality. This is central to the heart of healthy Christian community and sets the tone for your conversation. Be generous. Be comfortable. Be hospitable.

Each conversation goes like this:



**A time to begin**



**A time to read**



**A time for conversation**



**A time to choose**



**A time to end**

Each conversation is not a process to get through, but a time together to explore.

It may be that you spend a few gatherings on one theme or it may be that when you conclude all four conversations you decide to return for further discussion on a previous theme.

## What is Conversation Five?

Following your four conversations there is one further option for those groups, gatherings and congregations who wish to shape a response to what you have discerned, heard and talked about. If you choose to pursue this, you may want to consider inviting one of the Saltbush Scattered Community Ministers, a regional Minister, or another leader you are in relationship with, to sit with you over a time.

Conversation Five is a written response about your Christian community, the way it gathers (worships/discipleship/called) and the way it lives out its life in the wider community in which we find ourselves (witness/mission/sent).

Everything you need for Conversation Five is provided along with Talking about Salt.

So let's begin some challenging, discerning, conversations with each other as we start **Talking about Salt!**



# *Conversation One*

**A brief history of salt!**





# What is salt, where does it come from, and what did salt mean in the days of Jesus?

## A time to begin

*This is a time to gather, pray and simply be.*



Q. Why have you, or your church, decided to gather and talk about salt?

Reading: Jeremiah 17: 5-8.

<sup>5</sup> Thus says the LORD:

Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals  
and make mere flesh their strength,  
whose hearts turn away from the LORD.

<sup>6</sup> They shall be like a shrub in the desert,  
and shall not see when relief comes.

They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness,  
in an uninhabited salt land.

<sup>7</sup> Blessed are those who trust in the LORD,  
whose trust is the LORD.

<sup>8</sup> They shall be like a tree planted by water,  
sending out its roots by the stream.

It shall not fear when heat comes,  
and its leaves shall stay green;  
in the year of drought it is not anxious,  
and it does not cease to bear fruit.

*Simply read the passage in silence and then in silence sit for a time to ponder it alone.*

*Silence*

## A Time of Prayer

In your presence Lord we ponder those parts of our land, our community, our church, our world, that are like the salt land – parched places of wilderness.

*Silence*

In your presence Lord we ponder where we see life shooting green, goodness, growth and deep roots of faithfulness.

### *Silence*

Come amongst us Lord, as we open ourselves to you.

Amen.

## **A time to read**

*A time to read, reflect, before sharing*



You wouldn't survive without water, food or air, but you wouldn't survive without salt either. Salt is one of the tastes that humans have an exclusive set of receptors for and the only way we can get salt is to consume it. Too little salt will eventually kill you, but consuming too much salt will of course have consequences for you too. The World Health Organisation is continually assessing the world's consumption of salt and Australians consume significantly more salt than is recommended and is consistently in the top 10 salt consuming countries of the world.

Of course salt is more than simply what we sprinkle on our fish and chips and it has a history stretching back 1000's of years - even before Jesus used salt as an illustration. Wars have been fought over salt and battles swayed because of the absence of it for troops. Salt became one of the first commodities for trade; sea routes and roads were made for it, gold traded for it and slave's lives lost because of it. We have used it for preserving everything from bodies, meat, fish and vegetables. We have used it for health and healing and because of its healing and preserving properties salt has been used as a symbol for purity and permanence within world religions.

There is an early Chinese record of preserving fish in salt from around 2000 BCE, but in Egyptian tombs dating far earlier there have been found the remains of salted birds and fish. Salt as a preservative for meats reduces the moisture while at the same time killing the bacteria that would otherwise grow. The life of the people of Egypt has primarily been set within a thin strip of fertile land that runs along the Nile River, bordered on either side with desert. In this setting there is a long history of literally flood and famine. The Egyptians were hoarders of food, primarily grains, for the years of famine when the river failed and were most likely at the forefront of knowledge around preserving and curing meats, eggs and fruits. We see a glimpse of this history in the story of Joseph from Genesis

41, which is not written as a history, but does reflect something of the context of that part of the world from around 1500-1200 BCE.

If you are a lover of olives, then you can most likely thank the Egyptians for working out how to turn this inedible fruit into a valuable product by removing the bitterness known as oleuropein. The bitterness of an olive is used by the plant both to protect and preserve, but through the use of water and salt (brine) the hard, inedible and useless olive becomes soft, edible and much loved.

Salt has also been used as a marker between classes of people and a tool for oppression. Roman history was very class structured and there were the patricians (the privileged people) and the plebeians (the underprivileged or common people). Salt was given to the plebeians by the patricians as a way of keeping resentment and division at bay which gave rise to the term, "common salt".

In 1930 in India, Ghandi began a walk of nearly 400km to the sea in protest at the British Salt Act of 1882 that made it a crime for the people of India to collect or sell salt. They had to buy much needed salt from the British at inflated prices which of course further disadvantaged the majority poor. When Ghandi finally arrived at the sea after his long walk he reached down to collect a handful of encrusted salt, breaking the law and raising the outcry that led to the Salt Protests. Eventually the British imprisoned tens of thousands of people including Gahndi.

By this time, even with these very brief snippets of history you can begin to imagine the vastness of the history of salt.

In our Jewish Christian tradition salt also has a place as a symbol for purity and preserving the covenant or relationship between God and humankind. In the book of Numbers, one of the Jewish books of the Law, there is a reference to a "covenant of salt"<sup>3</sup> which is repeated in the second book of Chronicles<sup>4</sup>. As part of preparation for the Sabbath, Jews will dip bread into salt as a remembering of the covenant/relationship between God and God's people. An ancient tradition with an ancient ingredient.

In the days of Jesus salt was equally an important part of life and most likely very accessible. Being close to the Mediterranean Sea and also the Dead Sea would have meant that salt was never far away. It would have been traded, bought and sold, used in cooking and preserving, seen as helpful in healing and cleaning and of course a good illustration for preserving and flavouring faith and discipleship. 2000 years after the life of Jesus, you will have had salt this very day in some form even without thinking about it. Of course your body needed it and your

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3 Numbers 18: 19.  
4 Second Chronicles 13: 5.

taste buds and brain will have responded to it, but as you did, and if you are looking at your bowl of salt in the middle of your room now, then you are also continuing the long history of salt.

## A time for conversation

*Questions to discuss*



Simply take some time to talk about what you have read and also your own stories, memories or knowledge about salt.

What has changed in your experience of salt throughout your lifetimes?

In what ways can we see salt as an illustration, description or reflection of faith and community?

## A time to choose

*One action for the future.*



If you were to choose one of the following words to describe your own Christian community (church/congregation) what would it be and why?

Keep in mind the key questions "Who are we as a Christian Community? and What's important to us?"

salty

deep rooted

fading

passionate

tasteless

flavouring

wilderness

hopeful

dead

preserved

renewed

growing

different

dry

living

anxious



*Please record the key points of this conversation by writing or drawing images or some other way that suits you.*

## **A time to end**

*Standing – a closing and departing time.*



The peace of the Lord be with you

**And also with you.**

*Acknowledge each other or share the peace together.*

We pray for each other as we go from here  
And may our words and thoughts go with us.

Bless us and those we meet along the way Lord.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

# *Conversation Two*

**Choosing the salty life!**



# Salty communities of faith! What choices gives Christian communities flavour and what choices erode the flavour of a salty people?

## A time to begin

*This is a time to gather, pray and simply be.*



Q. Did you think about anything over the past days from the last conversation in your “salty” group?

Reading: Deuteronomy 30: 11-15, 20.

<sup>11</sup> Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. <sup>12</sup> It is not in heaven, that you should say, “Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?” <sup>13</sup> Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, “Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?” <sup>14</sup> No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe. <sup>15</sup> See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity.

<sup>19</sup> I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, <sup>20</sup> loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the LORD swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

*Simply read the passage in silence and then in silence sit for a time to ponder it alone.*

*Silence*

## A Time of Prayer

Lord what is it for us to choose life?

*Silence*

Lord what is needed for life?

*Silence*

Lord remind us that your word is very near to us; it is in our mouths and in our hearts .

Amen.

## A time to read

*A time to read, reflect, before sharing*



The passage you read from Deuteronomy (chapter 30) comes at the very end of a very long account (many chapters) of Moses giving the law. The Book of Deuteronomy is a series of speeches from Moses to the tribes of Israel as they are looking to enter the “promised land” and while it is full of commands and laws there is also the theme of choice; the choice that lies ahead for the people.

In Deuteronomy there are so many laws and commands that it is slightly overwhelming. Of course we know from the Gospels that because of these many laws, which the Jewish people added to and tried to uphold to varying degrees, they became restrictive, oppressive and God-less. But here in chapter 30 there is also a deeper reflection beyond a written or spoken law.

It is about life. Better still, it is about relationship.

This exhortation to choose life is not too hard, not in heaven, not too far away beyond the seas.... “No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart...”

And then there is the choice... life and death.... And the plea... “Choose life”! But at times and in ways it is hard to know what it means to choose life and perhaps harder still to choose life even when we do know.

Just as we know salt is essential for human life, what is essential for community life, for Christian community life and what is the word near to us, in our mouths and in our hearts that we hear reminding us where we have not chosen life and where we have life to choose still?

As essential as salt is to us, we all know that too much salt is unhealthy and turns a good meal into a plate of inedible food. We will have all been out to eat somewhere and found the meal we ordered so salty as to be unpleasant and difficult to swallow. It’s not that one thing can’t be life giving, but too much of a good thing can turn to bad, be overbearing and life denying.



Similarly from the days of our Bible reading from Deuteronomy 30 it certainly wasn't all the laws that gave the people life. The first five books of the Bible are sometimes called the books of the law and all up there are just over 600 laws to obey. It's not that what we follow is not life giving, but too much of a good thing can turn to bad, be overbearing and life denying. Certainly for the Jewish faith, and from it our Christian faith, there are ways and times when the laws and rules, the organisation and power, the property and possessions, the duty and responsibilities, although all good in general, have become life denying, overbearing and even oppressive.

There is an author, Diana Butler Bass, who is a commentator and writer on things such as religion, society, politics and faith and she has written many books. In one of her books, *Christianity after Religion*, there is a whole chapter on choice and it's called, "Questioning the Old Gods"<sup>5</sup>. In this chapter Butler Bass highlights the vast changes over the past decades in society including the choices people make about religion, faith and God. Where once we had little choice and there were expected paths in life, now it is totally opposite. From religion, family, culture, career, politics, friendships, identity, right down to toothpaste and coffee there is endless choice. People are even questioning faith and God which once would have been rare. Our world is questioning the old Gods and gods!

Yet within the church we often don't like to hear this, feel affronted, or believe that there will be some product, professional or programme that will save us from both the change and the choice.

Butler Bass writes; "For most of Western history, the Christian religion did well as an obligatory religion. Family obligation maintained church in local towns and villages over time. Obligations to God, like going to [church] or feeding the hungry people, held people in the faith for fear of angering the divine... But what now? In a world of choice, obligatory religions are not faring well, What is church to do?"<sup>6</sup>

Just like the Israelites from our reading in Deuteronomy, the church is in exile and perhaps it's about time. Exile is the place where God is most likely to dwell amongst us and yet before us is always the choosing! What is it to choose life? What choices give Christian communities flavour and what choices erode the flavour of a salty people?

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5 Butler Bass, D. *Christianity after Religion* pp. 39-63

6 Butler Bass, D. p.43

## A time for conversation

*Questions to discuss.*



Simply take some time to talk about what you have read - your impressions and opinions. Remember to listen to each other well and respectfully.

Who are we as a Christian community and what is important to us?

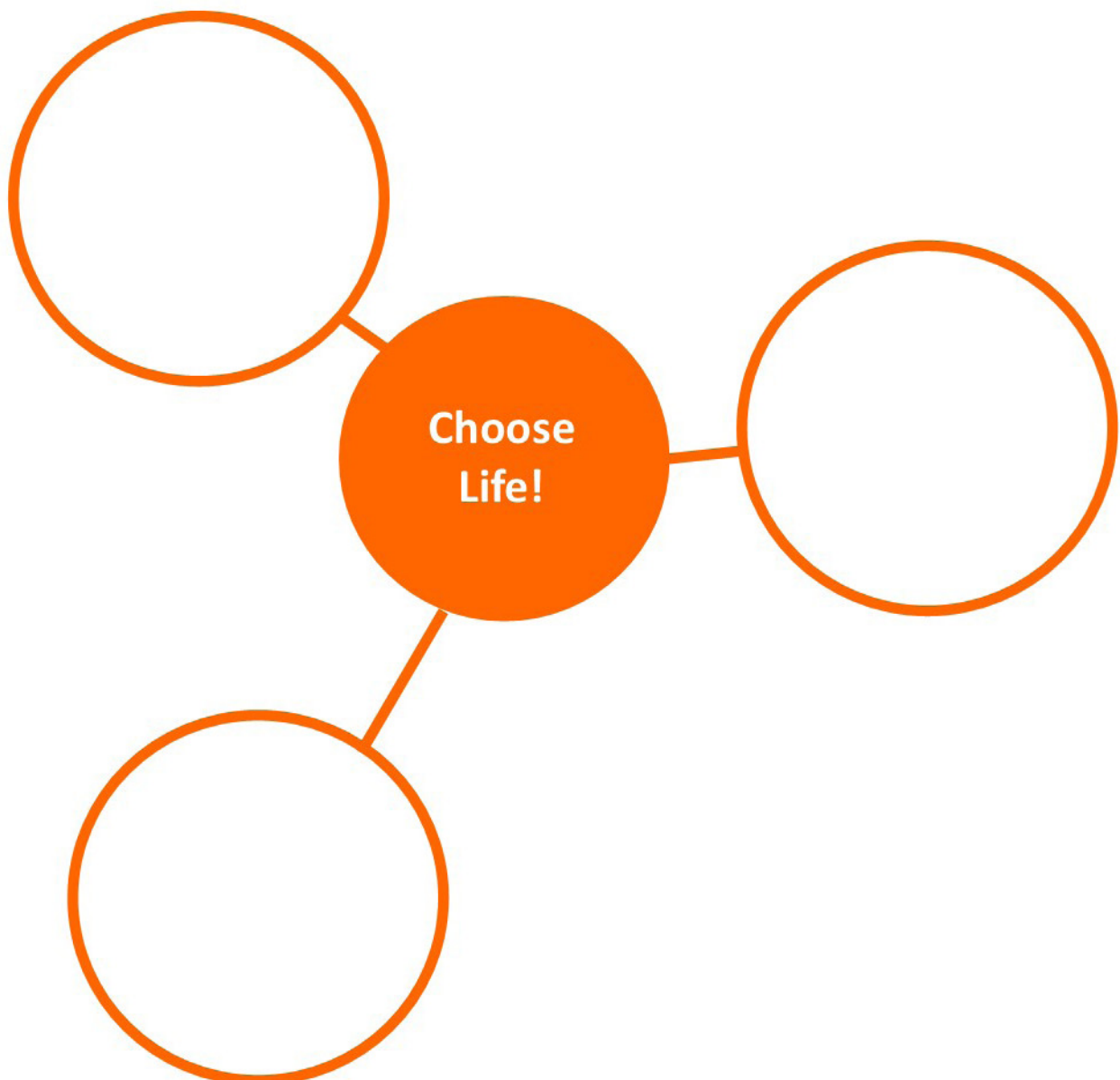
What does the challenge to "choose life" mean to your Christian community?

## A time to choose

*One action for the future.*



Write in the circles up to three ways your congregation/Christian community could choose life



*Please record the key points of this conversation by writing or drawing keeping in mind the key question "What is life giving in our Christian Community?"*

## **A time to end**

*Standing – a closing and departing time.*



The peace of the Lord be with you  
And also with you.

*Acknowledge each other or share the peace together.*

We pray for each other as we go from here  
And may our words and thoughts go with us.

Bless us and those we meet along the way Lord.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

# *Conversation Three*

**How salty are you?**





# Personal perspectives on faith and saltiness in a different world. Can you and your church still be flavoursome?

## A time to begin

*This is a time to gather, pray and simply be.*



Q. What did you feel unsettled by – or what lingered in your mind from your reading and conversation last time you gathered?

Reading: Matthew 5: 1-16.

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. <sup>2</sup> Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

<sup>3</sup> "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>4</sup> "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

<sup>5</sup> "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

<sup>6</sup> "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

<sup>7</sup> "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

<sup>8</sup> "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

<sup>9</sup> "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

<sup>10</sup> "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>11</sup> "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

<sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

<sup>13</sup> "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

<sup>14</sup> "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. <sup>15</sup> No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

*Simply read the passage in silence and then in silence sit for a time to ponder it alone.*

## A Time of Prayer

Gracious God, we cannot confine you to the limits of our theology, to the narrowness of our beliefs, break our small images of you, so your light may shine through.

*Silence*

Jesus our Teacher, you unsettle our comfortable ways, challenging our resistance to change, free us to travel the way of risk and be salt in the world.

*Silence*

Eternal Spirit, we are blessed because of you, as you prod, convict and empower us. Speak or shout into our lives the transformation you hope for in the world.

Amen.

## A time to read

*A time to read, reflect, before sharing*



We know this ancient passage from Matthew 5, usually called The Beatitudes (meaning “blessedness”) and have probably lived with it often – but perhaps we can hear it again as if it was the first time!

After going up a hillside (mountain) Jesus talks about the upside down ways of God. They are so counter to our views and understanding even 2000 years later. How can the poor in spirit, the mournful, the people who long for justice, who work for peace, even the persecuted be blessed? And then there are the passages about salt and light – not nice little illustrations for our minds, but in reality a challenge.

The salt and light images suggest that those who can be as salt and light participate in the upside down way of God, amongst the afflicted and least, the vulnerable and those who wholly long for some hand of blessing upon them. It is those people and those communities who are as salt, who are as light, who participate in that blessing way of God.

Of course a light can be put under a basket and hidden and salt can be cut down and mixed with other elements to be flavourless and useless. It is interesting, if not disturbing, to ponder when and where the church, or Christian communities,

have been strongly flavoursome and bright and when and why they have lost both flavour and light. A Christian community (and also the church as an organisation) easily becomes so covered, distracted, filled with its business, success, survival and promotion that in ways and times it would hardly find itself within the blessings of Matthew 5 and an honest reflection would at times find it hardly bright or flavoursome.

Yet there are those powerful few words spoken on the hillside to the disciples and to disciples down throughout the ages – “You **are** the salt of the earth.... You **are** the light of the world”.

As you read through the gospels, especially in the Gospel of Mark, you realise the utter humanity of the followers and disciples of Jesus Christ – the ones he strangely called salt and light of the world. Slow to understand and asleep, self-centred and self-promoting, lacking compassion and absent, they were hardly salt and light material. And yet they changed the world. Perhaps that reality changes how we hear those words of Jesus... “You are the salt of the earth.... You are the light of the world”.

One of the protestant church’s notable theologians reminds us of the significance of being “the people of the beatitudes”<sup>7</sup>. This theologian writes... “The church loses its fellowship with the... mission of Jesus if it is not ‘the people of the beatitudes’ and does not consist of the poor, the mourners, the meek, those who hunger for righteousness, the pure in heart and the persecuted’.

What does this mean? Perhaps it’s a reminder that the Christian community is called to live out the upside down ways of Christ. Perhaps a reminder that the Christian community is not grounded in the ways that seem to be so valued such as success and honour. Perhaps to participate in the “mission”, the way, of Christ means Christian community is blessed and blesses when it discovers itself made up of and made out of the ‘people of the beatitudes’. Of course that includes us. You and I.

Even in a world (and the church) that often talks of success, achievement and prosperity, being a people of the beatitudes, being salt and light, requires us to ask ourselves what it is that we value, who it is that we are and what it means for us to be as the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

## A time for conversation

*What is 'a people of the beatitudes'?*



A difficult question – How salty are you as a Christian community?  
When were the saltiest and brightest times of your life as a Christian community  
and what prevents you from being as salt of the earth and light of the world?  
(the baskets that cover your light and things that dilute your salt)

## A time to choose

What prevents you from being more salty and bright?  
Discuss your thoughts around the words below.



Money

Ourselves

The way we meet

The Church

Our size

Our pews and seats

Traditions

Our buildings

Other people

Our willingness

Distractions

The past

Our attitude

Lack of support

Hurts

Fear

Tiredness

Personalities

Society

Leaders

Our history

Our community

Us

Them

Keeping in mind the key question "As a Christian Community we want to work  
on or learn more about...?"

*Please record the key points of this conversation by writing or drawing images or some other way that suits you.*

## **A time to end**

Standing – a closing and departing time.



The peace of the Lord be with you

**And also with you.**

*Acknowledge each other or share the peace together.*

We pray for each other as we go from here  
And may our words and thoughts go with us.

Bless us and those we meet along the way Lord.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

# *Conversation Four*

**The future of being salty!**





## What lies ahead when we choose to be salty?

### A time to begin

*This is a time to gather, pray and simply be.*



Q.What do you remember from your conversation last time you met together?  
and what words from last week's list sat with you, even disturbed you?

Reading: Acts 2: 43 – 3:10.

**2** <sup>43</sup> Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All who believed were together and had all things in common; <sup>45</sup> they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. <sup>46</sup> Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

**3** One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o'clock in the afternoon. <sup>2</sup> And a man lame from birth was being carried in. People would lay him daily at the gate of the temple called the Beautiful Gate so that he could ask for alms from those entering the temple. <sup>3</sup> When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked them for alms. <sup>4</sup> Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." <sup>5</sup> And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. <sup>6</sup> But Peter said, "I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk." <sup>7</sup> And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. <sup>8</sup> Jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. <sup>9</sup> All the people saw him walking and praising God, <sup>10</sup> and they recognized him as the one who used to sit and ask for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

*Simply read the passage in silence and then in silence sit for a time to ponder it alone.*

*Silence*

## A Time of Prayer

Loving God, may we be filled with awe each time we see your handmove on the lives of those who are voiceless, invisible and marginalised.

*Silence*

May we bear witness to you as we share our lives with all people, seasoning our communities with your healing, love and acceptance.

*Silence*

May we be salt in our world, through Christ, Amen

## A time to read

*A time to read, reflect, before sharing*



The passage from Acts that you have just read is set following the life of Jesus in the early times of the Christian church. We can read this passage and hear it as a time of perfect community and yet within no time there was tension and struggle within that same community. We can see this account as a foundational time for the church, which it was, but in reality these people were the stragglers and remnant followers of Jesus who were as ridiculed and persecuted as any. These times were not perfect or secure for the followers of Jesus and the Christian community was as fragile as it was hopeful.

Within the life of the church there has always been a tension between fear and hope, doubt and faith, division and community and of course death and life. Only a few chapters earlier the followers of Jesus were huddled behind closed doors out of fear and yet now they are together sharing what they have and breaking bread together. Only a few chapters earlier they are absent and lost because of the death of Jesus and yet now they are affirming life, hope and healing. They have moved from being a people of the tomb to being a people of the living future.

Of course we can find ourselves in this tension, as individuals, but also within the Christian communities in which we find ourselves. In short we are always choosing between being a people of the tomb or a people of a living future.

Contemporary theologian Father Richard Rohr writes.... 'Resurrection and renewal are, in fact, the universal and observable pattern of everything. We

might just as well use non-religious terms like "springtime", "regeneration", "healing", "forgiveness", "life-cycles", "darkness", and "light". If incarnation is real, then resurrection in multitudinous forms is to be fully expected'.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps what is being said here is that if we believe in a God of creating, life giving, resurrection and renewing then that is who we are called to be a followers of Christ and as the Christian community.

Again we see this in the account of the healing of the man at the Beautiful Gate at the Temple in Jerusalem. Here also is the tension between light and dark, hope and despair, healing and servitude. The man was brought daily by friends or family to the gate where he would have sat and lived out his life begging for money. Here this man sat, at the foot of the Temple, with no expectation of anything new or life-giving, while the religious people came and went from the Temple, their place of worship. Yet into this place and time came the living example of Jesus of Nazareth. Of course, as Richard Rohr says, "If incarnation is real, then resurrection in multitudinous forms is to be fully expected."

The curious thing about resurrection, life-giving, healing, flourishing change is that when it comes to God it happens in the most unlikely places and amongst the most unlikely people. And like salt, it can take just a small amount to make a significant difference. Do we believe this?

Perhaps one of the most striking questions Jesus asked in his lifetime was to Martha, after the death of Lazarus...

"Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, <sup>26</sup> and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Of course as Christian community the future of being salty is not about success, wealth, or notoriety and is not dependent on age, numbers, professionalism or security, but simply on being open to change, new things, the Way of Christ and the renewing that God brings.

Do you believe this?"

## A time for conversation



How do you respond to Richard Rohr's comment... "If incarnation is real, then resurrection in multitudinous forms is to be fully expected."?

What resurrection and change have you seen in your church community over past times?

## A time to choose



Which leaf best reflects your church and which leaf best reflects who you can be? If you chose different leaves, ask how you can allow a change to happen.



Keeping in mind the key questions "As a Christian Community our priorities are...? & As a Salty Christian Community we want to do more of these things...?"

*Please record the key points of this conversation by writing or drawing images or some other way that suits you.*

## A time to end

*Standing – a closing and departing time.*



The peace of the Lord be with you  
And also with you.

*Acknowledge each other or share the peace together.*

We pray for each other as we go from here  
And may our words and thoughts go with us.

Bless us and those we meet along the way Lord.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.



# *Conversation Five*

**Salt mining!**





# Adding salt to the water, flavour to the taste and action to the salt mining!



## A time to begin

Q: What thought has remained with you since your last salt conversation?

Throughout the past four salt conversations what has been a major 'theme' (or nagging thought) for you?

Reading: Acts 15:1-11

**15** Then certain individuals came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." <sup>2</sup>And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to discuss this question with the apostles and the elders. <sup>3</sup>So they were sent on their way by the church, and as they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, they reported the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the believers. <sup>4</sup>When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. <sup>5</sup>But some believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and said, "It is necessary for them to be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses."

<sup>6</sup>The apostles and the elders met together to consider this matter. <sup>7</sup>After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "My brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that I should be the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the message of the good news and become believers. <sup>8</sup>And God, who knows the human heart, testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us; <sup>9</sup>and in cleansing their hearts by faith he has made no distinction between them and us. <sup>10</sup>Now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? <sup>11</sup>On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will."

## A Time of Prayer

Gracious God, may we be welcoming and open to those with whom we agree and disagree. Sharing with each other our hopes and dreams with freedom from judgement.

*Silence*

Holy Spirit may we acknowledge that even in the most difficult of conversations you are with us and leading us. That as we show hospitality to each other we are unaware we are entertaining angels.

### *Silence*

May we recognise we are all children of the Living God and made one in Jesus, in whom we have life, love and peace. In Christ, we pray, Amen.

## **A time to read**



There is something deeply satisfying about the Acts reading, it reminds us that from the very beginning meetings in the life of the church have always had drama and discord. Sometimes it feels like our meetings are menial and inconsequential yet much time is given to arguing over the outcome, often creating feelings of distrust and resentment. Then there are times our decisions have much weightier consequences but a unifying spirit of understanding and consensus imbues the meeting.

At this particular meeting the early church found itself before a crucial dilemma: either it would remain restricted to the Jewish cultural realities or it would open itself up to the wider world. The church of the first century AD chose the second option being available to the nations and using their languages and ways of thinking. This meeting's outcome has reverberated down through the ages, they mined salt and the saltiness has flavoured the church since.

So what can learn from this meeting when it comes to mining salt?

It is always really important to have a clear understanding of the issues. In the first verse, the author identifies 'certain individual's' teaching that unless you are circumcised you cannot be saved. It is important to also note, as does the author that the 'certain individuals' do not speak for the whole church, they are speaking for themselves. A few verses later the group making the claim was identified as a sect of Pharisees.

As with any dialogue finding common ground is helpful. While the Pharisee sect wanted circumcision to fulfil the custom of Jews and the law of Moses but at the same time, they believed in God's grace revealed through Christ. Peter, then wisely frames the theology of the early church in verse 11. "We believe," says Peter, "that we are saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ." Peter names what is essential and where there is agreement.

Peter is demonstrating a willingness to acknowledge that everyone matters, everyone has a voice and the church listens. This act of hospitality needs to be shown in all parts of the life of the church anyway as is shown when the church in Antioch sends Paul and Barnabas, who are welcomed in Jerusalem. It is important that we are expressions of the love of God through Christ that we extend that love to others no matter how much we disagree with each other.

As the expectations of how we meet and behave are set it is essential that we acknowledge the movement of the Holy Spirit in our meeting and take time to discern the Spirit's wisdom. Moments of quiet to consider the issues allows for us the space to move from emotional entanglement to a calmer more considered position. In those moments we are also more available to the movement of the Spirit of God.

When the meeting comes to that place of making a decision, it would be really helpful for a consensus to be reached and a statement made that reflects the flavour of the meeting and clearly articulates the decision. In the Acts reading a decision was made and articulated by James, this enabled the whole assembly then to support and encourage the work of the apostles.

Finally, as we mine for salt, we need to be confident that sometimes a good dispute, properly addressed, can lead to new insight and understanding. But a disagreement, honestly processed, can lead to greater clarity, a stronger bond, and a more faithful witness.

Know that as you mine for salt the Holy Spirit encourages and leads you.

## A time for designing and planning



In the sheet provided please go back to the information you recorded at each "Talking about Salt" Conversation and enter the information in each section.

Don't try and edit your notes too much at this point. Just sit with it, you might like to have an additional conversation about the things you have said together and clarify what you mean to each other.

Once you have compiled the information together, why don't you invite one of the Saltbush Scattered Community Ministers a regional Minister, or another leader you are in relationship with, to sit with you over a time and work through what your Salt Mining document might mean for you as a Christian Community.

# Step 1

In **Talking about Salt: Conversation one – A brief history of salt!** You recorded information about two questions - “Who are we as a Christian Community? & What’s important to us”?

These questions tell us something about ourselves and what we value. These things will shape how the Christian Community becomes more Salty over time and what things you will do together and individually in your community.

Write them below in dot point form as many or as few as you have:

*i.e. Our Christian Community is “deeply rooted” in this area because of our long ties with people, organisations and land*

In **Talking about Salt: Conversation two – Is salt necessary for life!** You recorded information about one question – “What is life giving in our Christian Community”?

This question tells us something about what gives this Christian Community flavour and purpose. These things are important to us and as a Christian Community they continue to add Salt and Flavour to us and the wider society we live in

Write them below in dot point form as many or as few as you have:

*i.e. Our Christian Community continues to be Salty because we support and care for each other and members of the wider community*

These questions tell us something about faith and saltiness in a different world. Can you and your church still be flavoursome? As a Christian Community we want to become more "salty and flavoursome" and there are things we realise we want to learn more about some things and work on some other things.

Write them below in dot point form as many or as few as you have:

*i.e. Our Christian Community wants to learn more about being disciples of Jesus the Christ and how that would make a difference to us and our wider community*



In **Talking about Salt: Conversation four - The future of being salty!** You recorded information about two questions - "As a Christian Community our priorities are ---? & As a Salty Christian Community we want to do more of these things...?"

These questions tell us something about putting our "Saltiness" into action. As a Christian Community we want to do and prioritise these things... We also want to do more of these things....

Write them below in dot point form as many or as few as you have:

*i.e. Our Christian Community will run a community meal each month for young families to build relationships with people*

## Step 2.

In the tables three and four above you identified things **you want to do** as a Christian Community – put them in column one as a heading.

In column two write a few short describing sentences **what – action** you intend to take about each of the things in column one.

In column three write a few short sentences about **why – reason** you are going to do these things (check what you recorded in tables *one* and *two* for some clues)

In column four write a few short sentences about **who – participants** that are going to do things to make this happen.

In column five write a few short sentences or dates **when – timeline** each thing is going to happen

In column six write a few short sentences about the **resources** (people/buildings/\$'s/help) you might need to carry these things out

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 5	Column6
Things you want to do	What-action	Why-reason	Who-participants	When-timeline	Resources needed
<i>Being Disciples of Jesus</i>	<i>Participate in an online Café with Saltbush on Discipleship in the 21st century.</i>	<i>We want our faith to make a difference to ourselves and our wider community</i>  <i>We want to learn how to do that</i>	<i>As many church members as possible</i>	<i>Every second month for four weeks in the coming year 4 sessions across the year</i>	<i>Zoom connections either at home or a combined one at the church for those who don't have internet access of feel comfortable using the technology</i>
<i>Community Meals</i> <b>EXAMPLE ONLY</b>	<i>A community meal</i>	<i>To build relationships with people in our wider community</i>	<i>Aimed at younger families</i>  <i>A community meals team will co-ordinated and run</i>	<i>The second Saturday of the month at 5.30 -9pm</i>	<i>Hall BBQ Tables Chairs \$ for snags Members of the church will provide salads</i>



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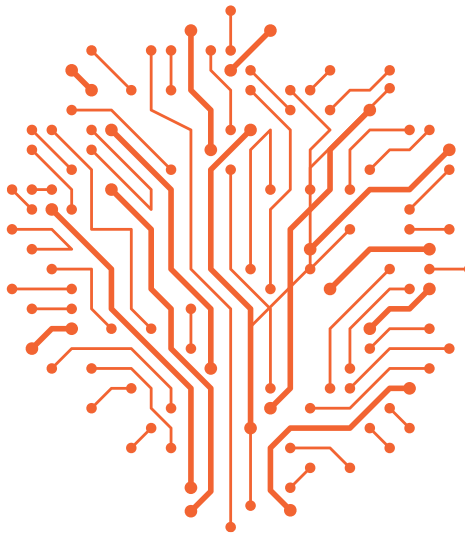
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# SALTBUSH

UNITING THE SCATTERED COMMUNITY