

3-1-21 DEVOTIONAL Are you SALTY enough?

This week Shiela Haynes told me she was struggling to keep up with her passion for photographing high school sports because both the boys AND the girl's teams were moving forward AND ... BASEBALL WAS STARTING! Yikes! Where is this year going!

This made me think of one of our GREAT baseball greats, Hank Aaron, who died on January 22 at age 86. He is remembered not *only* for record-setting achievements on the ballfield, but also for humility, kindness, perseverance, grace, and faith! Many described him as being "the salt of the earth"! Hmmmm I wondered ... the salt of the earth ... who do *I* know that I could describe like that today?

When I thought again about Hank Aaron and the divisive time in which we live today, it reminded me of what HE went through ... while Aaron, a black man, was overtaking the record of Ruth, a white man, he received so much hate mail that the Braves had to hire a secretary to sort through it all! Because of death threats, his family had to go into hiding, while a security team protected him around the clock. Aaron later described chasing and breaking Ruth's record as the worst period of his life.

But people who knew Hank Aaron described his GRACE under pressure, his steadiness, and his strength of character in handling the bigotry and racist remarks lobbed at him. In its article at the time of his death, *Sports Illustrated* said, "Among the nearly 20,000 Major League Baseball players, Hank Aaron was one of the very few who transcended the game. He was bigger than baseball. He was a beacon for civil rights, of humility and of honest work ethic, all qualities we associate with America at its best, not just in some sporting venture."

Just months before breaking Ruth's record, Aaron wrote in *Guideposts*, "I need to depend on Someone who is bigger, stronger and wiser than I am. I don't do it on my own. God is my strength. He gave me a good body and some talent and the freedom to develop it. He helps me when things go wrong. He forgives me when I fall on my face. He lights the way. The Lord willing, I'll set a new home-run record. If I don't, that's okay too. I've had a wonderful time in baseball and have enough great memories to last two lifetimes. I have been blessed."

Matthew writes: *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 underfoot.* Matthew 5:13

The context is important for understanding Jesus' words here, for verses 1-2 indicate that he was speaking not to a general audience but to his disciples, His followers. In any case, that means that when Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth," he was likely aiming his words people who were *trying* to live by his teachings. In other words, Jesus was linking salt of the earth to discipleship. By calling his followers salt *of the earth*, Jesus was describing *their* mission to carry His message to throughout the world/earth!

But his *subsequent* words should cause us to pause ... "*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 underfoot*" – THIS a warning that if they *deny* their mission, they are useless to His work! I suppose this goes right along with the text in James: *So, faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. James 2:17*

The church has long stressed that the doorway to salvation is labeled "Faith," and of course that is correct, but *here* James is concerned with how we live *after* we walk through that door! Faith alone, he insists, is dead if it does not spur us to positive actions for the good and well-being of others! The pairing of faith and works is the dynamic that drives a living and involved faith, one that seeks to change the world.

I suppose you could ask ... "How is my "saltiness" affected when I have no works? When we have no faith?"

I thank God for people like Hank Aaron, good and righteous people who followed God faithfully, doing His will ... I pray we can ALL be SALTY DISIPLES like he was!

Pastor Debbie