

## "Hearing Praises From God"

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Salt and Light are very powerful metaphors in any era; both basic elements for survival, both delight the senses... both have healing properties, both have destructive qualities, and both can move you to change how you move in, and interpret, your being in this world...and how you might make your observations and discoveries about the ever-intertwining modalities of spirituality, commerce, science....

So...what do you do, when you hear that you have a power, like a source of light to change things? Even you, a small grain of salt: even you, a light shining upon someone else's darkness?

First, let's think about salt...then see how its connection with light comes into play in this scripture lesson;

Salt was a very valued commodity in Jesus' time... did you know for example, that then, as now, it's the best known food preservative, and was valued commercially for many reasons, mainly because it was, and remains a necessary ingredient in the manufacturing process and it has been used in one of the oldest chemical industries – textiles, and dyes; - the Mediterranean Sea has been an important commercial route for these industries, and played a key role in trading,...those who engaged in commerce on this route usually exchanged textiles and dyes for wine and other luxuries...

Salt can be obtained from the sea through the process of evaporation usually in shallow basins warmed by sunlight...so the production of salt was relatively easy to achieve back then if one had patience! The salinity of the ocean plays a role in the formation of clouds – so for the astute traveler on this trade route, ...the big business guy, the sailors, and the humble fisherman, - salt played a big role in daily living...and brought all of these people from all walks of life, who earned their livelihood in different ways together in community... Ancient cultures, such as the Chinese, were boiling vats of sea water to make valuable salt as early as 2600 BC.

There is also evidence that salt fish and salt birds were offered as food for the spiritual journey, in the funeral rite for Egyptians, and, in Greek and Hellenistic theology fifth century before the Common Era, the four basic elements, fire, earth, air and water... were considered the main forces in the world...that...is where I can see a connection between the value of salt and light and their respective importance for quality of life for us humans. The warmth of the Sun-

fire- warming the sea water to produce a much valued commodity...it's not only science and chemistry...it's also an allusion to the-spiritual -alchemy!

Salt has therapeutic and healing qualities and, is often used for purification – I think about an old remedy our Grandma's taught us, for sore throats, gargling with very warm, salt water....Why do we do that? Salt draws the infection out! Medical Scientist's have spent much research time wondering why good old Chicken soup is so good for healing a cold...it's probably the salt content, mixed with all the healthy proteins and vegetables in the soup! Healing properties of salt, again found in a bath filled with Epsom salts to sooth you after a long day!

Well! As we move along...I think about the importance of salt in the social justice arena... I think of Gandhi's famous "salt march", an event where at least 100,000 protesters made their own salt from the sea, which was illegal under British rule, as it avoided paying the "salt tax." This civil disobedience inspired millions of COMMON people, and drew much attention to the political reality of a nation attempting to achieve its own unique nationhood.

Now, onto some thoughts about light for a bit-  
Light, like salt, is pretty amazing stuff! Scientifically-speaking, light is the portion of electromagnetic radiation which is visible to the human eye – responsible for how we creatures sense and experience light. The properties of light are: intensity, direction, frequency or wavelength polarization, phase and it moves at you guessed it the "speed of light" - 300,000,000 billion meters per second (pretty fast eh?) and is considered to be one of the fundamental Constants of NATURE. Light comes in packets, called photons. The study of light is called optics...and, the study of light is considered to be a very important area for research in modern Physics. Here, I think about the cosmos...the Sun, the Stars and Moon, indeed... the entire electromagnetic spectrum, refraction etc. And, light...when used as fuel...for a fire- maybe a campfire to gather around to tell stories, share a meal, sing some songs, etc...

Other faith traditions value light as a metaphor for their spirituality too... Hindus refer to the seven rays of light on their spiritual journey, Buddhist's might conceptualize light as elemental energies used for growth and transformation. In our Christian path...light is used as a metaphor for truth, and for delineating the difference between good and evil, knowledge and ignorance etc...even in the first chapter of Genesis, our story of Creation...light was considered to be "GOOD". So, light like salt plays a central role in Spirituality...we use words like vision, enlightenment, illumination etc... but it's not all about duality...is it?...

and, after all this rain we get here...when the Sun returns..how wonderful it feels to experience it's brightness and it's warmth on our faces, shining upon us...reminding us that winter will soon be over...and that spring is coming!

Light, like salt has healing properties as well! It's been used in treatment of many cancers for those who undergo radiation therapy..and I'm very grateful for that treatment as many of those that I love and have walked with, have successfully been treated in this way and have good stories about survival to share with other folks who are faced with making important decisions about treatment with their Doctors and families. Speaking of family...my Grandpa was a welder – by trade...I was always fascinated to observe him at work...apparently gluing certain things to other things that wouldn't normally want to stick together, with Light!! I thought the safety gear he wore was pretty “trippy” too! Like some kind of space/time traveler! He was a man, who taught me a lot about church life and membership in a small Ontario community. He also, taught me a lot about fishing...but that's another story. :) ...

Well, anyway...here we are in this century marveling at all the latest technological advances and where would we be without light? For example, consider the high speed internet...we sure wouldn't be able to look at our computer screens without the element of light and, when they crash on us darn things....what do we do?...we might turn on the TV...still another modern device that needs light for it's OPTIMAL performance.

Recently, a school chum of mine with whom I often share conversations about faith with, commented that: he thought that, after reading this particular passage... he might make a remark to the effect that; EVERYONE IS VALUED BEYOND MEASURE AND THAT THEIR VALUE SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO SHINE, SO AS TO BE A LESSON AND A PRAYER AND A HEALING AND AN INSPIRATION TO ALL OTHERS...and, that kind of made him think of the Mixedabilities Choir...Wow! Good healing words for me, as their Director!

One of our favourite songs to share in our community is “This Little Light of Mine” ... the song that we sang with our children earlier today,...I've often encouraged these folks to “keep shining!”, usually at the end of a busy day, when we've struggled through some tough issues in the work of Music Therapy that we do together. I've journeyed with my friends who sing in the Mixedabilities Choir – some of them, for just about 20 years. We've shared a lot of music, laughter and tears together. My challenged friends consider themselves to be blessed and pretty well loved in this community. For example: when one of the choir members calls me “teacher” because, quite frankly

that's often a role I find myself in, as well as helper/therapist...these folks have also shown me and my family the same loving commitment that we've offered them...not a day goes by that one of my challenged friends won't remember to ask how my son Stu is...Well! Stu, some of you here know him, he's a long haired guitar shredding rock star in their eyes...because of his dedicated work on the Mixedabilities Choir's Greatest Hits CD that he recorded and produced for The Mixedabilities Choir as his, and our first ever professional gig in a fully operational recording studio as a newly minted recording engineer....we're family and we've grown up together. ...And we love to sing with and for you! so...continuing on from last week's thoughts about blessedness, contentment, etc.

I would add that - we are blessed in whatever circumstances that we find ourselves in...Jesus' teaching about salt and light invites us to know – that, because we are blessed, it's now up to us to show the change that has occurred in us through faith, by living in such a way that WE'LL GET NOTICED! Those first hearers of this teaching might have said: “what?!! huh? humble little me?” ...But...

Jesus didn't say: “You MIGHT be the salt of the earth, or you COULD be the light of the world...rather...,

He used a first person pronoun... our hero, and teacher, Jesus said: “You ARE the salt of the earth, you ARE the light of the world” ...those first hearers of this teaching...hearing big praises from God, which I interpret to mean...you are blessed, you are loved, you are saved...and that offers some important cues about the nature of discipleship...Is your light visible?...at work, at home and at play? ...Does the indwelling presence of Jesus shine out from you? Can you hang out with those from other walks of life and faith traditions, and still be salty enough to engage in an honest discussion about why you chose Christianity as your faith path? Can you access those properties within you that demonstrate how much healing you've received from a community family like this one?

And... can you,...once that light has been lit, keep it visible even in some dark moments...

To borrow the words of one of the founding members of the Mixedabilities Choir – fellow LVUC member, - Margot,...“I say Yes!”