

SALT AND LIGHT

You are the salt. You are the light!

These are two basic, key ingredients in life.

Jesus uses them to get a very simple message across,.... **Yet** the amazing thing is that we usually get hung up on how the substances from the metaphor are used, and totally miss the point – the message that Jesus is trying to get across. It really is a very simple message.

I remember learning about this analogy when I was a child.

It was drilled into me: “I am the Salt, I am the light.”

I’ve heard countless sermons about it, too, which included wonderful stories about a ship caught in a terrible storm, and nearly crashing into the rocks and would have, except the captain saw the light from the lighthouse at the last moment! The “shining, radiant light saved him.

Since, this text is from the Revised Common Lectionary, I wonder how many congregations are hearing about that ship story this morning?

I looked everywhere for **that** sermon illustration, but I regret that couldn’t find it. However, I did come across a “nautical” story about a ship out in a very foggy night; where the darkness was so thick that nothing could be seen beyond the bow of the ship.

All was still and quiet, except for the distant sound of a fog horn.

Then suddenly over the radio came a voice. This is Officer Cadet MacGregor of the Canadian Coast Guard, please change your course 90° to due South.

The response from the ship was, “This is Admiral Johnson of the United States Navy, we will not be changing our course.”

Again, the Officer Cadet requested, Solar storms may have disrupted your GPS system, and I must advise you that you are heading right for us, and I strongly recommend that you change directions, now.

The U.S. Admiral retorted back, I am the commander of the aircraft carrier the U.S.S. Forrestal, accompanied by 12 escort ships we will maintain our present course.

A little more frantic, the Officer Cadet strongly suggests, “Please sir, you are on a collision course with us, and we urge you to change direction now!”

Once again, the Admiral firmly replies, “This is an American fleet; we are the strongest power on the planet, and will not change direction for anyone.”

There was a moment of silence.

Then it was heard on the radios, “For the record, this is Officer Cadet MacGregor at the Cape Breton, Louisbourg Lighthouse, ... your call.”

That joke doesn’t really apply to the message, except to point out that sometimes we get stuck on a certain self perception or a particular view, and are reluctant to change course.

Sometimes it is prudent to examine who we are, what we are doing and where we are headed.

With that in mind, let's look at this very familiar passage.

The first item – salt.

Let's view any preconceptions we have including bad feelings toward salt, such as when we have salt all over our car.

The salt on our car is there because we insist on driving on snow and ice, and it is cheaper than other options beyond sand and ashes.

Also, we've acquired a certain contempt for salt because of health concerns. True, processed food contains lots of salt, and we definitely do not need to eat 2,000 mg. a day, ...but the truth is, salt is necessary for life. Our bodies do need salt,... and it does liven up the taste of food.

Try leaving salt out of a recipe; it makes a big difference. The flavour of most foods are enhanced with a touch of salt.

In Addition, remember that in the time of Christ, salt was used to preserve food, too. Without salt the food for life would spoil and decay. Remember that. It was needed and very valuable!!!

Simple salt was important, and is important.

Okay, now we get into the meat and potatoes of the message.

Jesus declares that we are the salt of the earth, and goes on to say what is done when salt doesn't taste as salt.

With great disgust, it is thrown out / tossed in the garbage.

That statement is obvious.

Have you ever tasted salt that has lost its saltiness?????

?????

That's a trick question..... Because it is **Impossible** for salt not to be salty in taste.

Salt-less / "Un-salt" salt is absurd.

That was the point that Jesus was making when he asked what is done when salt has lost its taste.

If the white crystal in the shaker on the table doesn't taste like salt, THEN IT IS NOT SALT – – It's an imposter / a pretender!

It is worthless for the intended purpose, and worse: it is presenting a non-truth – a lie.

So, with that in mind, of course it is tossed aside.

Since, this was an important concept / lesson.... Jesus repeated it, in a different manner, with a different metaphor.

This time Jesus said, "You are the light of the world."

Jesus went on and said that it would be crazy to try to hide a city on a hill, just as it would be crazy to light a lamp and then hide the light.

Lighted lamps are put out for all to see. That is the nature / the purpose of a lighted lamp. A light does illumination. It would be ridiculous to try to make a light not be a light. It would wouldn't make sense to create a light and then try to make it into something it is not.

Before I continue along that theme, notice the context.
Jesus presented a universal application– to the earth / to the world.

Jesus didn't say you are salt or light only at work or only when you're with your close friends or at home with family.
Jesus said be the salt and light in all situations / everywhere / all the time.

Now, remove the examples of salt and light.
Jesus said BE YOU in all situations / everywhere,... even at church.

We could read into these passages and declare that it is a mandate to go out and do evangelism / to go out and be good salespeople / to be very visible / to flavour and enlighten all the world about Christ. We could do that, and it would reinforce what I was taught when I was young, but I don't believe that is what Jesus is really trying to get across.

The point is / the message is BE who /what you are!
Be honest / be real / be yourself!
Just as salt must be salt and a light is to be a light.... always.

So why is this such an issue, and.... is this a problem?

Recall what we read in Isaiah 58?
The text was exposing the problem of “pretending” / of putting on a show. They were going through the motions of acting righteous, but it was all fluff.
Sometimes in the church domain, we feel a pressure to conform / to act a certain way – a way that is considered “a model Christian”. In other words, to NOT really being ourselves.

It is one thing to practice civility / good form, it is quite another to “pretend” to be something we are not. And,.....maybe being something we are not.... has a deeper root, than just trying to fit in.....

There are a number of problems with not being “real”, and a big one is honesty.

Honesty is highly valued in the Bible.
Truth is found in honesty. **We are found** in honesty, and healthy relationships depend on honesty,..... and this includes with God, too.
And, it includes everyone and everything.... all the earth and the world.

If we don't face and embrace honest realities we may be tempted to abuse creation – to extract more than we replace and to believe that our excessive contamination isn't really destroying life.

Exploitation is another example of honesty not prevailing.

Many slave owners in the antebellum south convinced themselves of their superiority and that the “peculiar institution”– the euphemism for slavery – was good for those “poor Africans.”

Honesty is essential for real, healthy living..... for salvation, too.

Without honest self awareness, we can not repent and we cannot grow spiritually.

If we don't honestly and authentically present ourselves ...others will not respond appropriately..... and.... the person we truly are will not be able to grow and thrive.

If salt.....isn't salt, then it is an imposter.

Unfortunately, there are conditions / circumstances that press us into a shape / a mould that isn't who we really are.

Sometimes it is peer pressure, sometimes it's an incidental byproduct of trying to please..... or it can happen from abuse.

Parents are very powerful, and it is common for most children to try to live up to expectations or do be what gets rewarded.

For years, I kept a very neat desk, and it wasn't until I was in my late 30s that I realized that was “just Not me”. My father constantly stressed the virtue of being “tidy and neat”, and so I altered my behaviour in order to please him / to be affirmed.

After I allowed myself to be “me” at my desk, I discovered that I had wasted a lot of energy and time striving to keep my desk tidy – striving to be my father.

// Pretending is hard work.

In addition, occasionally parents.... intentionally or inadvertently... try to alter a child's nature... based on what the parent define as desirable.

And, those efforts can have dire consequences.

John Brashaw, back in the early 90s, wrote a lot about the “wounded inner child.”

That wounded inner child can take many shapes..... including living in rebellion..... or being someone else.

All wounds / reactions.... are as bondage and restrict us from being real.

The Isaiah text suggests that if we do not hide ourselves.... then our light shall break forth ... and healing shall spring up quickly, and.... the cry for help will be answered by God.

Breaking free from the bondage of pretending brings joy and delight, and invites the healing process.... growth..... salvation.

Moreover, when all of us are truly being ourselves / being authentic we'll be less prone to judge others and demand that each other fit a certain mould.

And when that happens, then we can **share** in the salvation journey / in growing because we would be free to engage in the issues and challenges.... because we won't be wasting so much time pretending and fooling each other.

Imagine the powerful witness of showing the world that we are weak and flawed, we mess up and make mistakes..... YET, God loves us anyways.... God has hope for us. God invests in us, and we don't even have to pretend to win God's praise.

In fact the opposite is true.

Imagine the impact of people being real, warts and all, and being loved!

That open and honest confession is the path to being free from addictions. And, the need to please / to deceive can be an addiction.

Perhaps, each of us are here for a reason?

Perhaps, who we are, each of us, is okay.

Maybe the world needs you and me.. the real you and me, flaws and all.

Maybe it's possible.... actually... necessary to be authentic.

From the Matthew text, I think God is calling us out.

Through Jesus, God is calling you and me out... to be who we are, AND to allow each other to be authentic, too.

Salt must be salt. A light must shine.

God gives us permission to just BE....how God made us.

And,..... that is how it all begins.....