

Isak Dinesen, the author of *Out of Africa* once said that, "The cure for anything is salt water: sweat, tears or the sea.". My take on what he meant is this is "The cure for anything is salt water – if it is a challenge great or small it is the salt water of sweat; if it is a great sorrow it is the salt water of tears; if it is a loss of self – it is the vastness of the sea." – with apologies and thanks to Isak Dinesen.

Against that high wonderful quote on salt I came across this interesting tidbit...in a historical word study on salt that has lost its saltiness in Jesus day.

"In (Matthew) 5:13, the salt (Alalos) that is referred to has three particular uses:

1. as we might expect it used to cure and preserve and to flavour
2. Secondly, it is used as part of burnt offerings to give them a certain scent and to make them burn better
3. and thirdly, it was widely used as a gift by well-wishers on any number of occasions was a sign of well-being"

So when Jesus says "You are the salt of the earth" it is indeed a high praise. You are not only useful, you are a blessing. You are to be revered.

However when salt loses its saltiness usually by contamination, it becomes in the Greek - moornai which also translates as silly or useless and from which in English we get the word Moron. Alalos Moronai had 2 uses. First, in the dry season it was simply thrown on the street to help keep the dust down in the street. Secondly it was used as a levelling agent for dung patties - the fuel for the outdoor ovens used in Jesus day. In the countryside children would form patties from the cow and horse dung, mix in Alalos Moraonai – useless salt - and let the patties dry in the sun. The salt would help the drying process and preserve them until needed. Then when the fuel patties were lit in an oven, they would burn longer, with a more even heat and a better smell. When the fuel was spent, the family would throw the ash out onto the road to dry and harden the surface."

"Jesus saw his followers as therapeutic agents in an impure world. Their example would keep the fire of faith alive even under stress. But if their example rang empty, they were worthless; they would be the mud under the heels of critics."

I love that image: You are therapeutic agents on behalf of the kingdom of God, "...levelling agents in a hurting world".

The Sermon on the Mount teaches us that faith and action go hand in hand. You cannot hide your light under a bushel. Likewise, to hide your faith by inaction would be to deny the saving grace of the cross and God's love for us. Faith leads to work. And that witness points to the Kingdom.

Also remember Jesus doesn't say to his followers, you must do this to be the salt, or that you must do that to be light. He says you are, but on the other hand don't be moranai.

You are the Light of the World. In the 1970 musical Godspell, in the song Light of the World, the lyric "You are the Light of the World," repeats over and over, in one production of the musical. A local theater of the arts group performed this song by taking the choruses of the verses, "You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. You are a city on the hill."

And in each case going to a random member of the audience and getting them to stand up and then singing the song to them. Dashing from one to another. "You are the salt of the earth. You are the city of God. You are the light of the world"

During the intermission that followed, a local pastor who happened to be working as a volunteer usher came across the 3 different people who had been picked to become the focal point of the chorus. And invariably each of them was a bit dazed, deeply affected by what had happened.

One woman looked through the pastor and said "You know – I attended and still have an original Broadway playbill and I have a copy of the Godspell album but it's been years since I listened to it and I have gone to church all of my life but tonight is the first time that I realized that he was talking to me".

"Talking to you?" the minister queried.

"Yes – You know, Jesus. He was talking to me. You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. You are the city on the hill - He was talking to me"

'No one has ever called me that before.'"

"You are the salt of the earth," is not just a catchy lyric in a pretty song in an upbeat musical. "You are the light of the world," are Jesus' words to his followers from The Sermon on the Mount. They are about what it means to live as people of faith in this world.

"You are the city on the hill." It is an assurance of what Jesus' followers were, then and now. I think for a moment of all those who have never been told, "You were created in the very image of God. The light that God created at the very moment of creation, that is inside of each one of you.

Listen to Jesus' words. They are meant for you,

"You are the light of the world.

You are the salt of the earth

You are the city on a hill"

You are. Go and live as people blessed by God. Go and live as God's blessing to the world. Today the sun will rise from the deepest darkness, just as it always has, just as it will tomorrow, and the next day. May you, too, rise, no matter if the structure that houses you has fallen, no matter the fracture of your heart. And when your world is shaken by all it has seen, may peace come like an old friend that has not forgotten you. May love come like a flood to protect you, wash you, keep you. May you rise and dance, sweet friend. Rise and lift one weary hand to the sky. The wind outside is waiting for your dear heart to meet it.

-Sabrina Hayeem-Ladani