

SUNDAY February 8, 2026 “Salty and Bright?”**Isaiah 58:1-9 | Corinthians 2:1-12 | Matthew 5:13-20**

Imagine nights that last 20 hours, and weeks without seeing the sun. This is real life in large areas Northern Norway. And those who live in this area enjoy it because of the fantastic skylines and northern lights dancing. This is called the Polar Night and is attributed to the incline of Earth with the northern hemisphere farthest from the sun and angled away. Depending upon where you are this Polar Night can last days to months. On the North Cape, the sun remains under the horizon for more than two months, while in Tromsø the phenomenon lasts for six weeks or so. In Lofoten, the dark period is short, just under four weeks. From Bodø and farther south, the sun does actually appear even in the deepest mid-winter, lighting up the winter landscape briefly around midday. At the other end of the scale is Svalbard, where the sun disappears completely for almost four months!

But what is experienced is a phenomenon that varies because of the light of the sun- from beautiful sunset colours in the south to a deep midnight blue in the north. On Svalbard, however, it is fully dark even at midday for several weeks around Christmas. But it is the “blue hour” which is the most iconic period of the day. This is when the residual light is reflected off the blue sea and the white snow, and the landscape is bathed in a glassy deep blue colour. This wonderful blue stays as long as the snow covers the ground and there is twilight. However, the blue hour occurs a few minutes later every day during winter, as the sun gains strength.

Yet the people in these communities do not hibernate and watch movies all the time! Ski runs are illuminated even in small resorts in Northern Norway. There are also some dog-sledding and scooter trips where participants wear head-lights. But of course it is necessary to be safe and carry a source of light with you always.

Here in Southwestern Ontario we like the sun and look for it within 2 days after snow or rain days. It is important to consider the brightness of the sun for many of us seem to be more at ease and free when the sun shines. Many people suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) which is a type of depression linked to seasonal changes. Often what happens is that individuals are often more tired, sad, have carbohydrate cravings, and oversleeping during fall and winter. This is triggered by reduced sunlight which affecting circadian rhythms and serotonin. Common treatments include bright light therapy, psychotherapy, sun vacations and medication.

In our reading from Matthew 5, Jesus continues his sermon on the Mountainside by making two clear statements: You are the light of the world; a city built on a hill cannot be hid. Then he explains that when one lights a lamp, it is not hidden. It is put in a place in the house so that all

may see. Jesus also says you are the salt of the earth, but if salt loses its saltiness what happens? It is thrown out. But what is so important about salt?

Salt we know has been used as a preservative for food for centuries. It is used in healing practices not only with saline solutions, but was used for wound care. In time, however we have learned that it is better when diluted with water for cleaning wounds. The idea of "rubbing salt in a wound" refers to the point that a bad situation will be made worse. Salt was valuable and for a long time it was used as currency for purchases of goods. This is also where we get the word 'salary' and at one point soldiers were paid in salt.

This past week we received notice that there is a shortage of road salt which our snow contractor has to deal with. Windsor we know is the home of salt mines but right now there is not enough winter road salt stockpiled to meet the demands of the city and other contractors who keep roads and sidewalks clear. Salt is valuable and needed as a substance for food and road care. But there are now other uses for this word salt including cryptography as it is a piece of random data added to a password before it is hashed and stored. Adding this number to stored passwords is a security process! Salt is valuable for its help in storage, preservation and healing.

Today I have brought my salt lamp. According to those who produce these lamps they have many good qualities. It purifies the air, reduces allergies and improves breathing and helps with sinus issues. These qualities are connected- purer air means less allergens and helps people to breathe. Because of this, there is less stress which leads to better sleep and when one sleeps better they have more energy to do things. The light's colour is adaptable to any room and is calming and may even improve the mood of the people. It also boosts serotonin levels which is a neurotransmitter and hormone that promotes overall mental well-being by stabilizing mood, reducing anxiety, and fostering feelings of happiness. But does this salt light combination really work?

Or did Jesus just like salt and light and that he knew how important they were then just as both are important today! Jesus says you are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Preserve what is good and remove what is bad. You are the ones who have heard his message just like those on the mountainside but what do you do with this information?

Throughout human history, people have lived through tough times. God knew that it was/is difficult to live faithfully and follow his teachings. This is what Isaiah states in the passage from Isaiah 58. Isaiah is asking difficult questions about what it means to truly worship God with faith. Isaiah writes that God wants us to serve Him out of our love for Him. We are to be obedient to Him. And if we do this, we will find that He will guide us into truth and we will be blessed. Isaiah also states that we are to live out the faith by showing mercy and being just. This is why we offer support

to those in need- the hungry, homeless, unclothed. For when we do this our light shines and the glory of God will be revealed. But we must be willing to call out to God when we need help and God will be there for us. This is what we are doing and must do if we are to bring the words to the world. Jesus called his followers salt and light-- are we worthy of these titles in this moment right now? Are we fulfilling our serving God with love, joy and obedient actions? Or are we merely saying- ok that's all I need to do? Someone else can do it? But what if there is no one else?

Paul was asked many questions by the people of the early church. The letters we read are his responses to the people and were written and preserved in order to help others understand from where Paul was coming. Paul's experience of Jesus was filled with different kinds of emotions. He explains when he first shared his story of Jesus he was trembling and uncertain whether they would hear the message of what Jesus had done to change and transform his life. As he spoke, he demonstrated the Spirit and the power of God. He taught those listening and reading these letters, the wisdom of the Spirit so that they might better understand God, and the teachings of Jesus. What Paul is teaching us is that to fully understand the gospel requires some spiritual insight, not just intellectual capability. That is, we need to experience God's Spirit and not just hear or read the words.

God truly loves people. Jesus came to teach the people and through His words Jesus teaches those listening and we who are hearing today, that we are to live out a higher righteousness that will influence society. As the "salt of the earth" we are to preserve and bring value and positive influence to this ever changed and decaying world. We are to remain distinct and to be visible as the "light of the world." We are to reflect Christ in a world that is facing more and more challenges to care for the people and God's creation. And when we act we are to do so in ways that bring God's glory. This is not easy, but the alternative is doing nothing and ending up with chaos.

Does the salt lamp work as it is supposed to? I am not sure. It is a natural salt and when lit offers a soothing oasis. And sometimes, this is more than we each need. A place to reflect and plan how we may reach out to tell others of the Good News of Jesus Christ. Let us be salt and light for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PRAYER

God of grace and hope hear our prayer as we call out to you in this time. Our world needs your guidance and strength so that we may help the many in need at this moment in time. Hear now the prayers of our hearts as we are salt and light, ready to do as you call us to be one with each other in Christ Jesus. SILENCE. Amen.