

Boiled, burned, buried



It was a fine spring day in heaven when three Old Salts, newly arrived, bumped into each other in the garden. After they had warmly greeted each other, Salt number three said, "So, what did you two do on earth to merit this?"

Salt number one said, "I don't know about 'meriting' this. I'm not sure I did anything on earth for that to happen. All I know is that the Master Chef kept putting me in boiling water, where there were a lot of really troubled people. I mean I was happy to be there- I really loved these people - but I don't know whether I made any difference. I just tried to show them the love that God had for them, by living with them through the tough times. Like I said, I don't think I did anything to earn this."

Salt number two said, "I spent my time in a furnace...." "Ouch!" said the other two, in unison.

".....Yeah. It was hot all right. But that's where the Master potter put me, with lots of others who were having a torrid time. Like you," he said to Salt number two "I tried to show them the love of the Master, and reassure them that their circumstances were important for their well being, and make them stronger. Did I make a difference? I don't know. Did I earn all this? I have no idea."

Then it was Salt number three's turn. "Well I was buried under a pile of manure." The others laughed and said, "Better you than me, mate! Anyway, how did that happen?"

"Well, in the old days, in the Middle East, they used to live in houses around a compound. At night all the animals would be herded in there to keep them safe from wolves, and in the middle was an oven, or 'earth.' Each morning the children would be sent to collect the animal dung to use as fuel for the fire, so the women could bake the day's bread. But they needed a salt encrusted plate of some sort to burn with the fuel. Something about keeping the fire burning steadily - or that's what I have been told."

"So you were the 'salt of the earth.'" said Salt Number Two, and they all laughed. "But how did that work in practice?"

"Well, it seemed the Master needed me to be with the dregs of society, the sort that the rest of the world throw out. It took a bit of getting used to, but in the end I didn't mind at all. I really learned to love them. I figured we were all in it together, and the Master's love was for them as much as for me. But I don't know exactly what good I did - apart from forming some good friendships, and advocating for them now and then. As for earning all of this.....I don't know."

While they were sharing their experiences, Jesus approached them.

"Welcome to my home," he said. "And what have you been discussing so earnestly?"

"Master," said Number One Salt, "we've been comparing notes about our lives on earth, how we worked wherever you sent us. We understand what we did, but we don't know how we merited all this." He waved his hand towards their beautiful surroundings.

"I'll tell you." Said Jesus. "You, Number One, endured the heat of boiling water in order to bring out the flavour of the people you worked with. Without you they would never have known the 'saltiness' of my love that makes it possible for people to be the best that they can be, so that others taste me in them. Otherwise they would be bland, at best, and not at all attractive to others.

And you, Number Two, bravely went into the furnace for me. That was tough, because as you were burnt up, your love of me sank deep into the surface of the 'pots' in the furnace with you, the people being strengthened for service. They came out shining with a glaze that will never crack, and withstand anything that the world throws at them.

Number Three..... I sent you to the lowest places and people so that they would burn steadily with my fire, and warm those around them. That fire also made it possible for them to prepare and cook the spiritual food needed to feed the communities in which they lived.

So each of you has given your lives for others, as I gave mine. You were my flavour, my shining strength, and my compassion on earth. How could I not welcome you into my rest?

Now go. Explore this country, and I reckon you'll meet up with lots of people you knew and blessed during your lifetimes. Perhaps they will be the real answer to your questions."

And so all three Salts did just that. And much to their surprise found exactly as the Master had said - those whom they had blessed - and were themselves blessed. Which is as it should be, because after all, what good is a beautiful home if you can't share it with friends?

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