

Living Into the Light
Isaiah 60:1-6 and Matthew 2:1-12
January 3, 2010

“Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.”(Isaiah 60:1) How many of us remember being young children who were afraid of the dark? We had our parents to come into our rooms and search under our beds with the flashlight and in our closets for monsters we knew were there. We heard them, didn’t we? Our parents came and lovingly reassured us, most of the time, that there was nothing to fear. It was only our imagination playing tricks on us. Sometimes they would agree to leaving the lamp on next to our beds, gave us our own special flashlights, or bought us a Super Hero nightlight to protect us. We felt safe and protected in the comfort of the light.

Jesus is the light of the world. He comes shining upon us the promises of God’s grace, hope and love. We are the body of Christ; therefore, we are called to be the light as well. Sharing the gifts of God’s grace, hope and love with one another. While we typically think of Isaiah’s call as the summons to an individual prophet, this text clearly indicates that God’s summons is to the whole people in their collective witness.¹ God is summoning us to live into the light that dwells within us and to share that light one with another. “Nations shall come to your light...” (Isaiah 60:3) Walter Brueggemann suggests, “the idea of land or nation refers to claims of wholeness, well-being, safety and security.”² As children of God we are to live our lives such that we all find a sense of wholeness, well-being, safety, and security in the arms of God. We are equal guardians of God’s love and light in the world around us.

¹ Dr. Susan Bond. Quarterly Review - Lectionary Study – Year A. Fall 1998

² Ibid

And yet we know there are times when our light grows dim or gets extinguished by the circumstances we find ourselves in. One of my favorite songs as sung by Kathy Troccoli is “Go Light Your World.” Some of the lyrics are as follows:

Frustrated brother, see how he's tried to	Carry your candle, run to the darkness
Light his own candle some other way	Seek out the lonely, the tired and worn
See now your sister, she's been robbed and lied to	Hold out your candle for all to see it
Still holds a candle without a flame	

Take your candle, and go light your world
Take your candle, and go light your world

Those lyrics strike me because they offer hope and promise in the midst of brokenness. We know those who try to light their candle in some way other than God. They try drugs, alcohol, gambling, and even sex to fill the void they are feeling. The housing crash we are continuing to recover from is a reflection of those who were lied to and robbed by unethical mortgage lending companies who should have said no to most of these families to begin with. Families who moved into houses with mortgages they could barely afford who found them doubled or tripled as a consequence of the adjustable rates they were given. Robbed and lied to indeed. “Go Light Your World” also speaks to the call upon us all to be present and engaged in what is happening in our world. It is not just about individual needs, but it is about global needs. While at times the light might be extinguished or go dim, the source for the light remains ever present with us. Jesus is always with us, even though we might have difficulty seeing and sensing him there. We are called to be a part of helping each other to see Jesus in our darkest times. That means not only providing resources, but listening to, being in prayer with, or simply just sitting with each other in silence listening for the still speaking voice of God for some direction.

In today’s climate of ongoing war, job loss, loss of home, health concerns, financial crises, the loss of those we love... we can understand why we find ourselves in darkness

struggling to hold onto the promises of God. Struggling to see the presence of God in the midst of grief, loss, and fear. We are a people of faith and we know the truth. God is always present in our lives. I would like to add here if you are one of those people who is feeling as though your candle or faith is growing dim or is about to be extinguished, take a moment to look around at the other people sitting here today. We are here for you. Yes it takes courage to say “I am struggling,” but none of us can make the assumption that people know we are suffering or are in need. Many of us suffer in silence needlessly and I stand before you saying that you do not have to suffer in silence nor walk this dark night of the soul time in your life alone. None of us has all the answers. We are not expected to, because there would be no need for God’s grace and God’s presence in our lives if we did have all the answers. We can offer to one another the gifts of our resources, the gift of prayer and our presence.

Not only is it difficult acknowledging to others our struggles, but it can also be intimidating and a little scary to be the person asked to help. How are we called to let the light within us ignite the light of others? We must be about the work of nurturing our relationship with God through reading scripture, praying, and being in community with others. One candle burns brightly and gives off a great deal of light. But we all know that the more candles that are lit the brighter the light will be. The brighter our world will be. Someone once said, “Sometimes God only gives you enough light to see the next step.” Sometimes living in the light means taking the first step and trusting that step will lead you into the next step. God has given us enough light to direct us and we can see when we are called to “go there.” We are called to go where there is a need trusting that God has given us enough and equipped us with resources needed for the task at hand. We have been given enough to share with one another. We have been given enough time, talents and other resources to be able to give to one another.

Not only does our reading from Isaiah today tell us to “Arise, shine, for your light has come...” (60:1) but it also speaks of those who were exiled returning home. “Your sons shall come from far away and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses’ arms. Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice...” (60:4,5) Isaiah’s vision is one in which justice and inclusion reign. Those who have lived in the darkness of isolation, fear, and rejection are comforted by the light of love, acceptance, a place to belong, a place of welcome and regain a sense of purpose and longing to share what they have been given with others. It is a return to wholeness, well being, safety and security. That is the gift we give when we stand in the gap with one another. Our actions either help to build or destroy others and in turn to build or destroy our sense of community. Howard Thurman writes, “Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.”

Let us come alive on this Epiphany Sunday 2010, Peace family. We know the darkness and isolation that exists when the light and love of God seems to be absent from us. We know that trying to fill the void with other things only causes us further pain. Those times when the light of our candle is extinguished and we fear all the things that we imagine happening even though they might not really exist. We are called as a people of faith to stand together restoring a sense of wholeness, well being, safety and security for those around us and for the betterment of our world and community. We stand on the promises and presence of God while living out our faith. Let us live into the light by sharing of the gifts and resources we have been given with those in need. We have been given enough to share with one another. “Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.” Amen.