

“Arise, Shine, for Your Light has Come”

a sermon by the Rev. Marsha E. Brown,

Pastor of New Horizons Presbyterian Church and President of Ritenour Co-Care, Inc. ,

a Non-profit providing food and rent and utility assistance to
our neighbors in the Ritenour School District.

Isaiah 60: 1-6

Focus: Each of us has light that we reflect from God to the world when we are partners with God in our everyday life.

Function: Shine that light, look for opportunities to brighten the world, shine in the darkness of despair, evil, injustice, hatred, spite to bring peace and wholeness to others and the world.

Here we are in a New Year, 2016. Epiphany, the season of light is upon us. We just celebrated Advent with light and candles, and now we are talking about light again. This season is not considered a big liturgical season now, but in the past, it was one of the biggest- right along with Easter and Pentecost.

Epiphany is about recognizing the light that comes from God that we all reflect - just like the children’s sermon I just did with the flashlight. God loves us and gives us worth. We realize it through others and scripture and the Spirit and we give it to others.

The text I am about to read was written at a time after the people had returned from exile. Two generations afterwards. Things were still in shambles and most of Israel’s leaders had been exiled, so it was difficult for the culture and faith to thrive. It was a dark time. People were depressed and sad and hopeless. They did not know how to begin this work. The writer of this

part of Isaiah meant to inspire and uplift them as they began the hard work of rebuilding community and faith. Let us listen for God's Word to us as I read Isaiah 60:1-6.

The In-gathering of the Dispersed

60 Arise, shine; for your light has come,

and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.

² For darkness shall cover the earth,

and thick darkness the peoples;

but the LORD will arise upon you,

and his glory will appear over you.

³ Nations shall come to your light,

and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

⁴ Lift up your eyes and look around;

they all gather together, they come to you;

your sons shall come from far away,

and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms.

⁵ Then you shall see and be radiant;

your heart shall thrill and rejoice,^[a]

because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you,

the wealth of the nations shall come to you.

⁶ A multitude of camels shall cover you,

the young camels of Midian and Ephah;

all those from Sheba shall come.

They shall bring gold and frankincense,

and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.”

This is the Word of God. Thanks be to God.

With the people of Israel who first heard these words, I too hope for better times! This last year especially has been full of hatred, and bloodshed, and inequality and greed to last a lifetime. National leaders seem to be working hard to see who can be most hateful in order to pander votes. The media hypes it up and more people get angry and armed to protect themselves against the ‘other’ being vilified. It is NOT peace of earth! We too need some light in our lives! How can that happen? How can we disrupt this pattern and truly help peace to flourish? How can we be light to the world?

Will you agree that God helps us to do what we cannot alone?

Are you willing to help stem the tide of evil proliferating in our world- even between people we may know?

Then we need to ask God to give us light to shine on this darkness. Light which exposes evil for what it is and does not let it get a stronghold in our minds or actions. Our responses to people who are being hateful matter. We do not return hate, but try to understand the misguided person as best we can. The Spiritual program I teach once a month called Geography of Grace, says to turn to wonder when you are hurt or confused by another’s hurtfulness. In scripture, we are explicitly told not to return evil for evil, but to turn the other cheek, not to hate our enemies, but to love them. “Loving” them does not necessarily mean being kind to them and letting them tear us or someone we care about apart, however. It has to do with firmness and boundaries as much as kindness.

God is good and God loves us. God is powerful and when we seek God in our lives, the light that we receive grows in us and dispels darkness.

So how do you get close to God?

How do you get close to anyone?

Time spent together.

Silent time when you are receiving God into your being. Try a 10 minute timer and just be quiet and see what God brings to you. Prayer is not only or even mainly the words we say to God. True prayer is when we are listening to God to help us to answer our own prayers!

The people of Israel in this time were desperate for help and hope. Many of us are too. There are many issues that drive us to such a state: poor health, pain, increasing dependency, financial worries, family issues, lack of control in our lives, loss of friends and grief, the list can go on and on. Yet God is here with us IN these concerns to help us to be sustained IN them - not in spite of them. The light that God gives to us is better than our own attempts at fixing our lives. God works in serendipity: you know - when things are coincidental and turn out much better than we planned? Or even in the shadows of our lives using our disease or situation to bring about something better than we had before. God is the great healer, the great reconciler, the lover of all people who calls us to take the high road and love back; even when we don't feel like it.

Kayla McClurg, a writer I follow says, "It is possible for the light to be in the world it created without it ever being known." Will we add our voices to the cacophony of complaint, or choose to offer light? What might we do or be?

I heard about a person planning to surprise someone with a thank you note every day of this year. Somewhere in Washington a curious person takes strangers out to dinner once or twice each month, in exchange for hearing their stories. In our community someone is inviting his

Christian and Muslim friends to a potluck dinner later this week, just for the fun and the food and oh, yeah, his wish for a better world. This kind of world with more spaces for light to shine. To bear witness to this light, to become light, is our primary work on this side of Christmas.”¹¹

This 2016, I invite you to spend time with God and seek that light that outshines the darkness around you. And when you do, share it with others so that they too can spread this glorious light. Amen.

¹¹ Kayla McClurg, Inward/Outward.org; Church of the Savior, Washington DC