**Light in God**

**Narrative Lectionary**

**November 26, 2017**

Isaiah 9: 1-7 Russell Mitchell-Walker

We have all experienced challenging, difficult times or have heard of them, times that could be named as dark or darkness. Recently we have heard of the plight of the [Rohingya](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-42094060) people in Myanmar who have had to flee from persecution and terrible horrors, and we now pray for their safe return, and resettlement without harassment. There has been too many shootings and terrorist attacks which make it feel like dark times. There has also been an excess of sexual harassment and abuse cases named in recent weeks, particularly against famous people. Shortly after many actresses accused [Harvey Wienstien](http://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-41594672) of sexual harassment, stories began to show up on twitter and Facebook, with the hashtag [#metoo](https://twitter.com/search?q=%23metoo&src=typd), of women sharing their experiences of being sexually harassed, assaulted, or abused. It is all too common. Indeed, I saw more than one post as well as heard commentators say that it is a small minority of women who have not experienced some level of harassment. It is not acceptable to have this level of disrespect for women within our male culture and we are all called to work with our boys, young men and our peers to teach them differently. This past week, this sharing has expanded to a hashtag [#churchtoo](https://globalnews.ca/news/3877228/churchtoo-hashtag-sexual-assault/), of women sharing their experiences of harassment and abuse within the church. There are some horrendous, terrible stories out there.

One of the initiators of this story sharing is Emily Joy, a spoken word poet who was a Contributor at [Skylight Festival](http://www.skylightfestival.ca) last summer. She shared that as a youth a 30 year old youth leader pursued a relationship with her. She added that she was later forced to apologize. Another woman was forced to apologize to the wife of the pastor who harassed her, for leading him into an affair. There are many stories also about women being told how to dress, and being blamed for being too attractive. The darkness of these stories is palpable. When you look at these stories it is easy to understand why some people have been turned off of church. It is time that we as men take responsibility for these attitudes and challenge them as we find them in ourselves and our colleagues, friends, and family. This week we have also been hearing of the stories of those who shared at the inquiry for Murdered and Missing Indigenous women hearings in Saskatoon. These are also dark stories that are part of a troubling history that we all need to come to terms with.

There is light in the darkness. That is the message of Isaiah. Isaiah tells the people of Jerusalem in Judah, that those who have walked in darkness have seen a great light, and those who have lived in darkness, on them light has shined. The darkness of this time is that Israel was being attacked by the Assyrian forces and King Ahab, scared about Jerusalem being attacked, makes an alliance with the Assyrians. You may remember King Ahab from the story of Elijah a few weeks ago. He married Jezebel and was convinced to worship Baal and build a temple to Baal in Jerusalem. It was difficult and terrifying times, and the alliance led to Israel being defeated by Assyria, the people being taken into captivity, and Jerusalem becoming a vassal of Assyria, impoverishing and enslaving the people. This is the darkness the people were living in when Isaiah gives them the message in today’s scripture. The rod of their oppressor will be broken and the nation will grow again. It is a message of hope to a nation in despair. The child that has been born – it is past tense – is not intended originally to refer to Jesus, but some believe to be King Ahab’s son, Hezekiah, who will be a better, more just king for the nation. Interpretations of this passage being a reference to the Messiah, to Jesus, came later.

Light is an important reference here, for light overcomes the darkness. Last week in our book study of [Flipped](http://www.dougpagitt.com/writing/), by Doug Pagitt, the chapter was about light and how Jesus said, you are the light of the world…let your light shine so that others may see the love and good works of God in you. One of the major flips presented in this book for many of us is that we are in God – Paul says ‘in God we live and move and have our Being’. Many of us may understand or believe that God is in us, but what about us being in God? Think about that for a moment. God exists in everything so we as we exist, we are in God. In presenting the chapter on light, Doug takes us through the scientific concept of light and matter. That everything is in motion, including all matter because it is made up of moving particles, atoms. We are all connected in this movement of matter and energy, yet as particles and waves we do not lose our individuality. Atoms are in constant motion and the motion is predictable. Doug explains: “the movement of electrons inside an atom follows a particular orderly pattern and when an electron leaves its orbit and then returns, it creates a photon. When we see light ours eyes are absorbing the zillions of photons packets bouncing off items around us”. So he concludes a with a few points:

* The key to creating light is to make a change in the atom
* The key to light is change
* The way to get orderly electrons to change their predictable behaviour is to add energy.

Then Pagitt continues: Jesus’ saying ‘you are the light of the world’ can “remind us that we are a particle expression of God, visible in all kinds of colours and useful in all kinds of purposes. Our individual manifestations of that light are in the life of God, not distinct from it.” Are you still with me?

So as we experience light, as we share God’s love and grace, compassion and justice, we are sharing light, and that is God. It is all part of the interconnectedness of everything which is in God. So let your light shine that others may experience that light and God. It is this kind of light that Isaiah was talking about. The light that can give hope to a challenging situation.

In the challenges of sexual harassment and abuse in the church, the light in the United Church is the work we have done to develop policy and work for prevention and response when we receive a complaint. We have the Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response Policy and Procedures. It is a comprehensive policy that has a number of trained consultants, and officers to work with those affected when a complaint is made and guide the church through the process. There is support for both the complainant and the respondent. There is light in breaking of the silence that has been happening, as we know the truth will set us free. There is light in the woman I met at IMCF yesterday who told me she was at the hearings for Murdered and Missing Indigenous women this week, offering support to those sharing their stories.

God is in the light and the light is in God. We are the light when we shine God’s love and hope in situations of darkness. God is with us and in us and we are in God, through those challenging dark times in our lives, and seeing the light of love offered to us in these times helps to overcome the darkness. May we draw on that light, that love, and share it, that we may shine in God.