

“Have Seen a Great Light”

Isaiah 9: 1-7

But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

² ^[b] The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;

On those who dwelt in a land of gloom, light has dawned.

You have made the nation great;
you have increased its joy.

They rejoiced before you as with joy at the harvest,
as those who divide plunder rejoice.

⁴ As on the day of Midian, you've shattered the yoke that burdened them,
the staff on their shoulders,
and the rod of their oppressor.

⁵ Because every boot of the thundering warriors,
and every garment rolled in blood
will be burned, fuel for the fire.

⁶ A child is born to us, a son is given to us,
and authority will be on his shoulders.
He will be named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ There will be vast authority and endless peace
for David's throne and for his kingdom,
establishing and sustaining it
with justice and righteousness
now and forever.

The zeal of the LORD of heavenly forces will do this.

This week, we find ourselves once again living between the already and the not yet. We have already experienced the hope, peace, and joy of the Advent Season but our journey to Bethlehem is not complete. And in this strange in between, we hear the words from the prophet Isaiah. Like us, they straddle the line between past/present and future, bringing forth a vision of perpetual peace.

As I read this text, I was drawn to the New JPS translation according to the traditional Hebrew text. It translates verses 1 and 2 this way..."The people that walked in darkness have seen a brilliant light; On those who dwelt in a land of gloom Light has dawned."

This image of a land of gloom resonates with me, given everything which is happening in our world right now. Because as one commentator put it, "We have lived and are living in the 8th Chapter of Isaiah which describes a time of trouble when God is silent and reality is violent. She goes on to say that God has seemed silent and distant for so many during this pandemic while others have heard the roar of God in wildfires and hurricanes, that for centuries, black and brown Christians have endured silence and violence from the white church. She ends with the statement...Where's the hope?"

This is the question I find myself asking daily as I see the numbers of death from Covid continue to rise. This is the question I find myself asking daily as I talk

with members whose loved ones are dying. This the question I find myself asking daily as we live in this land of gloom, wondering when we will ever experience light and hope again.

Yet like all those years ago for the people of God, in the midst of all this gloom, a light dawns. We heard this past week, that a vaccine has been released. It is being given to front line workers and people who need it most. Since the beginning of this pandemic, we are figuring out new ways to communicate with loved ones even though we cannot be together. Since the beginning of this quarantine, we are hearing stories of people looking out for neighbors in small and life-giving ways. And closer to home, a light dawns as this community of faith holds a baby dedication for a little one who is the fulfilled hope of the heart for a beautiful family. These are just a few examples but each one of these examples remind us again of the promise of Advent...that this world will not have the last word, that love and light will overcome, that the Word Made Flesh came to dwell among, to become one of us so that we can become like him.

Or as one person put it....when we so directly see God's movement in the world it empowers us to boldly claim what God will do in the future." Let me say that again, as people of faith, when we so directly see God's movement in the world, it empowers us to boldly claim what God will do in the future.

So people of God.... I invite you to hear the "poetry of God's embodied promise [once more as it pierces] the silence of our.....despair".

"For unto us a child has been born for us, a son given to us;

authority rests upon his shoulders;

and he is named

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,

Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

7 His authority shall grow continually,

and there shall be endless peace

for the throne of David and his kingdom.

He will establish and uphold it

with justice and with righteousness

from this time onward and forevermore."

May we always find hope in the memory of how God has acted in the past while looking forward to the promise of God's Kingdom coming to fruition here on Earth just as it is in Heaven for all of God's people. For we know that today and all days...on those who have dwelt in a land of gloom, a light has dawned. Amen.