

“Rise in the Darkness”

Psalm 112

Praise the LORD!

Those who honor the LORD,
who adore God’s commandments, are truly happy!
² Their descendants will be strong throughout the land.
The offspring of those who do right will be blessed;
³ wealth and riches will be in their houses.
Their righteousness stands forever.
⁴ They shine in the dark for others who do right.
They are merciful, compassionate, and righteous.
⁵ Those who lend generously are good people—
as are those who conduct their affairs with justice.
⁶ Yes, these sorts of people will never be shaken;
the righteous will be remembered forever!
⁷ They won’t be frightened at bad news.
Their hearts are steady, trusting in the LORD.
⁸ Their hearts are firm; they aren’t afraid.
In the end, they will witness their enemies’ defeat.
⁹ They give freely to those in need.
Their righteousness stands forever.
Their strength increases gloriously.
¹⁰ The wicked see all this and fume;
they grind their teeth, but disappear to nothing.
What the wicked want to see happen comes to nothing!

We continue our journey through Advent, allowing the shadows and the light to guide us as we make our way to Bethlehem. With each step, the shadows and the light remind us that they work together to tell us the story of God’s love for all of God’s people.

I have to tell you, this week, I experienced a strange twist in the words found in Psalm 112. At first when I read through them, I felt their power, their passion,

urging us as the people of God to rise up in the darkness, like an impassioned leader preparing his people for battle. Think Hamilton as the chorus of “Rise Up” motivates the troops. But instead of inspiring me, these words from Psalm 112 brought tension to my body, heightening that fight or flight reaction. Their weight felt heavy on my shoulders as it brought to mind images of Wonder Woman jumping in to save the world, images of superheroes wearing capes fixing all the brokenness found in our world. Psalm 112 brought to mind images of feats of great strength which I as a mere mortal knew that I would never be able to achieve.

Sitting with these images, hearing their impassioned order, I became angry and frustrated. I found myself arguing with the Spirit, saying, “You mean to tell me that on top of everything else I am dealing with in these moments of uncertainty, you mean to tell me that it is up to me to rise up and fix everything which is broken in our world. God, I do not have it in me, not now, not next week, not anytime in the foreseeable future. Because right now God, I am barely treading water. I know I do not have it in me to solve everything let alone rise up in the darkness and save the world.”

In response to this, as the Spirit is known to do, it invited me to pause in my anxiety, to pause in my feelings of being overwhelmed. In the midst of this powerful and passionate order filled with urgency to rise in the darkness, the Spirit invited me to simply breathe, to simply be, to simply accept the grace it offered.

Because it reminded me that I, that we as people of faith have the strength to rise in the darkness only because God is so faithful, only because of who God is, only because of what God has already done and continues to do to bring about healing and wholeness in our world.

This reminder came to me through the words of someone who is way smarter than me when he simply shared that we can only be the light for others, because God is the light for us, that this verse telling of the people of God rising in the darkness is not a requirement for our faith. Rather it is a blessing of our faith. It is an affirmation of our faith. It is a statement of our faith. It simply is a matter of fact...not because of what we do. Not because it is up to us to save the world. We rise in the darkness as a light for all of God's people because of who God is.

Let me say that again....this verse which shares that the people of God rise in the darkness as a light is not a requirement. Rather it is an affirmation. It is a blessing. The author of Psalm 112 simply names this as a matter of fact.

To the outside observer, this may not change much in the grand scheme of things but for us, for us as people of faith, this statement of fact makes all the difference.

Because suddenly, we see, we know, we understand it is not all up to us. It is not about what we can do. It is not about what we can achieve. It is not about our

budgets, our numbers, our successes. It is about God and who God is. It is about the fact that God has named us and claimed us. It is about the fact that God has invited us to be in a partnership, working together, to be in relationship sustained by the grace and love of God. Suddenly we realize that it is not about our self-confidence or our efforts. Rather it has always been about us being the light because Jesus is already the light of the World, transforming us, as Beloved Children of God now and forevermore.

As soon as I heard this reminder of God's grace, of God's love, of God's invitation to simply be, the tension left my body. My shoulders dropped. My spirit softened. And I was simply able to breathe. I was able to hear these words to rise in the darkness as an invitation, not as a demand, but as an invitation. I was able to embrace what was being graciously offered by a God who loves me more than I could ever imagine. With this invitation, I was able to breathe in the peace of God and become a vessel through which my God will work and is already working. I was able to hear the invitation to become the welcome, to become the light, not because it is all up to me to save the world but because my God was already there, is already there. My God is already working in this world to bring healing and wholeness for all of God's people.

I was able to find comfort and strength in these words because they again reminded me of the promises of Advent, God with us, the Word Made Flesh, becoming one of us so that we can become like him.

This is why we can rise the darkness. This is why we can find joy in the midst of the sorrow. This is why we can be the light for all people, just like the people of God have been doing since the beginning of time. Because in a world which values achievements, values what we do, values successes, this change of narrative is life-giving. It is empowering. It is freeing. It is once again a reminder of who we are and whose we. This is knowledge which is written upon our hearts. This is wisdom which can never be taken away from us. This is what transforms us into the people God created and calls us to be...people of hope, people of peace, people of justice, people of love.

You see, too often in our lives, in our faith, and yes in our communities of faith, we forget these things. We begin to listen to the narrative of this world. We begin to listen to that voice in our head which tells us we are not enough, that we are not doing enough.

Yet time and time again, the Spirit of God breaks through the overwhelming noise and reminds us that it is not about what we can achieve. It is not about what we do. That for those who love the Lord, that for those who walk in the ways of

the Lord, we are more than enough, that we have been claimed and named by a God who loves us more than we could ever imagine, and that we do not walk this journey alone, that no matter what, along all of life's ups and downs, we know that love and light will always have the last word.

To rise in the darkness, to become a light for all people does not take feats of great strength from us as the people of God. As Psalm 112 tells us it simply takes us walking in the ways of our God. It takes loving our neighbors as ourselves. It takes becoming a vessel through which God can work to bring about healing and wholeness for all of God's people. It takes us being open to the ordinary and extraordinary ways in which God is already moving in this world to bring about God's Kingdom here on Earth as it is in Heaven.

It takes a "deep groundedness which connects us always to the presence of God in our midst. It takes a profound peace which encourages us to feel the pure, unhindered heights of life's beauty. It takes us being content in the Spirit, knowing that we are uplifted and supported always by our God who always makes a way out of no way." It takes us "dwelling in integrity, compassion and love in the midst of the ambiguity as we discover that the shadows have become a tending place in which our hopes for justice, peace and grace come to light as they rise in the darkness for all of God's people. Amen.