

Your Light

Isaiah 60:1-6
Epiphany; Series C

A couple sat down to enjoy a home-cooked meal with their neighbors one evening and left their guests in the dark. They didn't want to leave them in the dark, but it was easier that way. The couple had met their neighbors a week prior and extended an invitation to them for dinner. They didn't know each other too well but they thought that eating a meal together would be the perfect opportunity. And so the table was set, the food was hot and ready, and all were seated. The husband paused for a moment before they served the food, thinking that he would bless the food. But he didn't know whether or not their neighbors were Christians or went to Church or regularly said a blessing. He didn't want to offend. And so they served the chicken, scooped the mashed potatoes, dished out the green beans, and they ate. And their neighbors were left at the table, eating in the dark, without knowledge of the light of a gracious God who provides both daily bread and the bread of life eternal.

Today is the Day of the Epiphany of our Lord. Today we begin the season of Epiphany in which the church unwraps the gift of the Light of Christ and the salvation he brings. In the Season of Epiphany we remember that Christ, the light of the world, is for all people. God came into this world through a particular people, but his grace is for all.

It is during this season that we hear those stories about non-Israelites, foreigners, who were grafted into God's people. We read again and reflect on the story of the Magi who followed the light of the star that led them to the Christ child. We hear about Naaman, the Commander of the Syrian Army who was washed and cleansed of his leprosy. We read about Rahab, a citizen of Jericho, who heard about the wonders of the God of Israel and led her whole family to safety by his grace. It is during this season that we remember that the grace of God, the light of Christ, has come into the darkness our lives through the waters of Holy Baptism. Christ shines upon us and in us. And so Jesus can say of you and me, as his followers, "Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (Jn 8:12). And so "let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Mt 5:16).

The purpose of walking with a light on, with a flashlight, or during the day, is so that you can see where you are going. Light brightens the area around us so that we can properly walk without stumbling, without being blinded by the darkness. With the absence of light, it is very easy to get lost.

Many of you know that I enjoy hiking and camping. A few years ago while Talitha and I were still in St. Louis, MO, two of my friends and I went on a short backcountry camping trip in southern Ohio on what is called the River to River trail. It runs from the Mississippi River on the West end to the Ohio River on the East end. We were ill prepared, to say the least. We got a very late start the first day. In an attempt to reach our destination, we hiked not only in the rain but also in the dark. After a while our headlamps and flashlights grew dim as they were running low on batteries. We had very little light to help us navigate the trail. At one point we decided to stop and set up camp for the night. The next morning, as I

explored the area around our campsite, a lump in my throat developed as I noticed that we had set up camp on a bluff, less than a hundred feet from the edge of a cliff. How difficult and dangerous it is to walk in darkness with little or no light to guide you.

Jesus says that the world in which we live, his creation to which he came, is a dark place. Also, in our Old Testament lesson, the prophet Isaiah says, “For behold darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples” (Is 60:2). And people in this dark world remain in the dark and try to find their way through life. And they get lost. And we see how lost they are when we watch people jump from one spouse to another and one relationship to another looking for love, security, and someone to provide for them. We see how dangerous it is for people to wander in the darkness of this world without light when we flip on the television or turn the page of the newspaper to learn about the latest shooting massacre.

Our world needs the light of Christ. It began in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve disobeyed God’s will for their lives, and tried to rise above their creatureliness. They experienced guilt and shame as a result. And this guilt and shame made room for darkness. The guilt and shame led them to run—far away from God, far away from the light. They were once united with God, close to the light, close to his voice, gladly hearing his will for their lives and obeying it. Now they and a whole fallen world with it has been running, and running, and running. Now there is separation. And that is original sin. It is the reality that we are born separated from our God, far away from the light, living in darkness. We need to be brought to God once again through the light of Christ. He is the way, the truth, and the life.

Our world needs the Church to faithfully shine the light of the Gospel in this world. Our world needs you and me, as members of the Church, faithful followers of Christ, to shine the light of Christ brightly in the world as faithful fathers, mothers, husbands, wives, children, grandchildren, grandparents, neighbors, and co-workers. How else will those sitting in darkness see the great light? Only when the light is shining, like it was so many centuries ago to lead the Magi to the Christ child, will others know the way to their God.

It is difficult to be light in our workplaces, in our homes, in our conversations. It is especially difficult when you are the only one shining. It isn’t always comfortable. It doesn’t seem fun. It can be lonely and awkward. We can be the brunt of jokes. And so we may be tempted at times to dim the light. We might do this in subtle ways. We may laugh at inappropriate jokes that make us uncomfortable because it is easier than naming the inappropriate joke for what it is. We may over indulge in all kinds of things at get-togethers and parties with family, friends, and co-workers in order to fit in a little more. And in these small, subtle, but significant ways we may miss opportunities to be light. We may miss opportunities to show and model that God’s holy people have a value system that is different than that of the world. We may miss the opportunity to model a godly life of morality. We may miss the opportunity to shine forth the way to Christ for a world sitting in darkness.

The prophet Isaiah reminds us that when the light of Christ is shining brightly upon us and in us as members of the church, the nations come. They see that we are different and they get curious. People ask us what makes us different. People want to know the source of the light that shines within us. When the light of Christ is shining brightly upon the parishes of our Lord’s church through the faithful preaching of the Word and the forgiveness of sins, and through the proper giving of the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, people are drawn to it. God blesses his Word. Others might not come as

quickly as we want them to and in as great a number as we would like. But that is not our concern. We just shine forth faithfully the light of Christ that God has given to us and he will take care of the rest.

He is our provider. He who once broke the heavens to bring the light of salvation into a dark world, will provide our parish with the resources we need to shine his light brightly and faithfully as long as he wants it to shine in this place, in this community. Through his Spirit that lives in you he will also provide you with the courage to shine forth the light of Christ in the darkest of places. And when you should lack the courage, receive his forgiveness. Eat the Holy meal of his body and blood and renew your strength through his grace. Return to the promise of your baptism where your God cleansed you of guilt and brought the light of Christ to live in and shine through you. Receive his grace so that you can be unburdened and free to shine. For, someone that God has put into your life might be sitting in the dark and they may need you to light the way. Amen.