

Sermon for Epiphany 3  
January 22, 2023  
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Los Alamos, New Mexico

Isaiah 9:1-4  
Psalm 27:1, 5-13  
1 Corinthians 1:10-18  
Matthew 4:12-23

Today Isaiah brings us a message of hope.  
And not just a little hope, but a big hope.  
Imagine who it is he's talking to:  
a people who have watched their brothers and sisters slaughtered and those who lived were  
carried off into a never-ending exile.

Imagine what that feels like.  
Isaiah describes the mood of the country:  
the people who walked in darkness resided in gloom.  
And not only did they walk in darkness, they lived in deep darkness.

I was thinking about that feeling as I watched the news  
and prayed for folks in California  
where seemingly endless rains flood their streets  
and storms knock down trees and leave people without power – Darkness.  
And their darkness pales  
compared to the horrendous onslaught against Ukraine amid a grueling winter.

My own experience does not hold a candle to the winters being experienced elsewhere.  
I might shiver at the snow falling,  
But what is that to the torrent of missiles and shells.

When I look back on the winters in the Midwest  
I thought that was bad  
when the clouds hid the sun for weeks on end,  
and you just long for even a peak at the sun.

I remember that last winter before we moved to New Mexico.  
One afternoon, I could see a line of blue on the horizon  
and the sun began to shine through,  
and I suddenly knew we'd be able to see a bit of a sunset.  
I ran about a mile to the edge of the woods on which I lived,  
a place we called sunset ridge  
because it had a clear view of the western horizon.  
And just that brief few moments  
lifted my spirits from the gloom for two or three days.

But the gloom returned:  
the gray, incessant darkness that's called seasonal depression.

True depression is even worse  
because the intrusion of a bit of sunshine won't lift the spirits.  
The wall of darkness won't crack,  
the gloom won't lift,  
no light can shine into the well of desperation.

As I was pondering the feeling of darkness in Isaiah,  
I remembered a movie I saw several years ago,  
"What Dreams May Come."  
It depicted a relatively unorthodox view of life after death.  
Robin Williams plays a doctor who dies in an accident.  
He was killed as he ran to help others.  
His wife is an artist who had lost a son and a daughter,  
and now has lost her last love.  
When the doctor comes to the life after,  
he discovers his wife is in hell.  
What he seeks is to save her from hell,  
and insists on making the journey to find her.

When he arrives at her hell,  
what he discovers is she is living in what was their dream home,  
but now it is a burned-out shell.  
She wanders about the house, doing what she did,  
but she can't really see him.  
He pleads with her for a long time,  
and realizes that her hell is self-perpetuating  
because she cannot remember anything else.

The doctor realizes that he must enter into her hell to be able to reach her,  
to remind her that there was a life before,  
that there was love.  
He reaches her, she hears him,  
but the effort has taken too long and he has forgotten,  
and has drifted into hell.  
Now she must reach into their hell  
and pull him out by reminding him,  
they love one another.  
There is hope.

That is the light that Isaiah gave to his people,  
and that is the great light that Jesus Christ has given to us.  
There is hope in this world.  
There is a light that the darkness cannot overcome:  
on those in darkness, the light has shined.

It's so easy to lose hope.  
The events that overwhelm us,  
the poverty in the world,  
the storms that torment us,  
the war that tears at the souls of women, men and children,  
the pain we suffer,  
the effort it takes just to get by.

Imagine how Zebedee must have felt.  
This man comes up along the beach  
while you and your family and the hired men are unloading the nets of the fishing catch.

Suddenly, you hear this man tell your sons:  
"Follow me and I will make you fish for people."  
And they abandon their nets and go off with this guy.  
"Hey, Boys. We've got work to do."  
What am I going to tell your mother?  
We've got obligations."  
What do you think you're doing?"

But the call is strong.  
James and John walk off and join Jesus and Simon and Andrew  
and the others on spreading the good news.  
It can't have been easy.  
It's not easy for us today even in a culture that purports to be Christian.  
We have our obligations, our duties, our commitments.  
It takes a lot to look deeper into our lives  
and see what changes we have to make  
if we are to see the light of Christ in our lives.

In a perfect world  
we would all work to ensure that each of us has the ability,  
the time, the resources to discover the light of Christ in our lives.  
I mean, that's what our job is in this world,  
to become the persons we were born to be  
rather than the person  
those with influence in our lives would have us be.  
It's easier to follow the directions of others  
rather than developing that interior compass of the heart  
that would lead us to God.

In our world, which is as imperfect as the world  
that the Corinthians lived in,  
we all quibble over who's better,  
who's in authority,  
who's better.  
That's what Paul was criticizing:

that the followers were creating divisions among them,  
and aligning themselves with whoever it was that baptized them  
rather than realizing they are one in Christ.

It was not that they shouldn't argue.  
Let's get real.  
You're not going to have two or more people come together  
without arguing.  
But that doesn't mean that they can realize  
that in Christ we are all together.

That's the world I believe Jesus Christ wants us to work for:  
A world that helps, assists, enables and ensures  
that each of its members becomes the person they were born to be.  
That's the Kingdom of God come to earth.

Realize that we "who walked in darkness have seen a great light;  
we who lived in a land of deep darkness –  
on us a great light has shined.

We are the children of God.  
We are blessed beyond all reason.  
As it says in the Psalm:  
"The Lord is my light and my salvation;  
whom then shall I fear?  
For one thing I asked of the Lord;  
one thing I seek;  
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life."

This is the house of the Lord,  
we are the children charged with turning this imperfect world into the Kingdom of God.