

## “LIGHT ENTERS INTO DARKNESS”

Isaiah 9:1-4 1Corinthians 1:10-18 February 2, 2020

An older woman is homebound because of a bad hip. She sits in her rocking chair, gazing out the window at the various signs of life in her neighborhood. Parents and children are riding their bikes together. The neighbor is working on his garden. Another woman is climbing up a tree to fix a birdhouse. This older woman sits and ponders whether getting a hip replacement is worth the stress of facing surgery, therapy, medications, and visits to the doctor. She prays for God’s guidance.

Finally, one day she sees another older woman whom she knows to have bad knees outdoors taking out the trash and playing with her grandchildren. So this woman decides to take the risk and get the hip surgery. It was all the things she thought it would be in terms of doctor and hospital visits as well as the surgery itself. But the physical therapist showed this woman body exercise and movements that she can practice so she too can resume a normal life. For once, this woman did not have to go back to her pain pills. If she keeps up on her therapy and maintains her daily routine, she now has the normal life of going shopping on the senior citizen bus. She now is part of the crowd who walks in the local shopping mall in the mornings. Somehow the wintry day of seeing another lady who had knee surgery playing with her grandchildren was the light that entered into her darkness. Here is an example of a person who was walking in the painful darkness who has seen a great light. (Isaiah 9:1)

I liked this story of darkness entering into the light. However, the part about the woman climbing the tree to fix the birdhouse seemed a little over the top to me—pun intended. Some recurring themes in all of Isaiah include that there will emerge a messianic king whose reign will be eternal. Also, his reign does not need violence to enforce the peace that he brings to all people. Such a people are made whole spiritually, physically, and economically as a community. Isaiah, like all of the prophets, speaks to a collective community, not necessarily to just individuals, though it remains accurate that individuals can find practical application from the prophet. Next, Isaiah believes that God works through a small group or remnant of believers. So if the major rank and file choose to assimilate, jump ship on the community, or seek other gods, the God of Abraham continues to work with the small remnant who is left. This is a living word of encouragement to modern

communities of faith—like ours, who find our worship and Sunday school attendance numbers dwindling with time and circumstance.

God is capable of reversals, especially the termination of hated political, military, and economic empires that use force and power to get their own way and remain the dominant influence of community and global concerns. Two metaphors are made here. First, the light enters into darkness. This hope can elicit an unrestrained rejoicing for those who yearn for the end of the yoke that is currently imposed on them. The older woman in the above illustration has the yoke that results in the physical limitations of a bad hip. Yet, this yoke could include some form of unemployment, underemployment, financial difficulty, or unresolved family issues.

Isaiah believes that God can use a historical agent to reverse the current trends of discomfort, despair, and dread in any era. “Light” for Isaiah is linked to God’s splendor, majesty, and sovereignty. It is disputed whether the new messianic king would be Hezekiah, possibly Josiah in a latter era, or Jesus as Messiah as the New Testament writers argues. The point is that God can deliver all people from the current darkness in which they presently reside. There is real reason for authentic hope, because Isaiah affirms a providential God whose ways remain mysterious but whose love is unconditional. This God keeps the promises made to the people of faith!!

Second, the agricultural metaphor is used in verses 3-4. Today, the rough equivalent might be a metaphor for the source of economic income, security, and a future. This could apply to an industrial, academic, small business, agricultural, or any sort of community that has limited avenues to sustain its income base. This continues to make texts such as this a “Living Word”—regardless of the modern, even post-modern times we live in. God is capable of multiplying options of opportunities to grow and prosper as a community. The old yoke or constraints that might have made people feel “trapped” in a given work, family, school, or community situation can be broken. Today’s oppressor can become tomorrow’s bad dream that people wish to forget. Regardless of any bad or dark situation Christians find themselves in, God is fully capable of terminating it and ushering in a new era of peace and possibilities of growth.

Now continuing with our theme of light entering into darkness, I want to move to our text from Paul in 1 Corinthians. Paul’s objective in writing this text is stated in verse 10: “There be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose.” How does that apply to us today and is it even

possible?!?!? We as Christians might disagree over any number of doctrinal, worship practice, social, and moral issues. We might even have a strong passion about our views. Paul's encouragement is for Christians of all times not to take our eyes off the cross of Christ!! This is the source of the power of the church. Paul does not want any Christian to forget that this whole Christian church movement began with a rejected, crucified messiah. This cross is where God chose to show God's power.

How are divisions overcome? How is community built? These are the two questions that Paul would want any congregational council or church mission outreach effort to engage in. For those in the world who walk in the darkness of various personal, financial, and family issues in their lives, the Christian church should shed light into the lives of such people with one common confession of being saved by the power of Christ on the cross. The cross remains a universal symbol of God's presence with those who are in the darkest of night of their soul. Where is God? God is right next to us—suffering with us, but pointing us to new light and life!!! This is the gospel of any Christian church. From the essential theology of Paul in 1 Corinthians 1. May it be so for our church in this time and place—God pointing us to new light and life! Amen and amen.