

11-29-20 First Sunday in Advent

Sermon- Rising Light

Scripture- Isaiah 60:1-5a, CTW Ps 80:1-7

Hymns- TBD with Dave Shover

Theme- Living in the light of Jesus, we prepare to celebrate His birth. Repenting of our sins, we put away the works of darkness and dress in the armor of light. We prepare and anticipate!

I. We Are Called to Rise and Shine!

A. Seasonal Affective Disorder (S.A.D.)—also known as winter depression or winter blues—is an emotional disorder that some people experience in the darker months of the year. Those who get **S.A.D.** have little energy and become very depressed. Additional symptoms may include a tendency to overeat, or not eat enough—both of which can cause more depression and more sadness.

We all know, though, that it doesn't have to be winter for people to feel sad. In fact, this year, because of the Covid Pandemic, more and more of us are singing the blues more often!

In addition, studies show that rates of depression for Americans have risen dramatically in the past fifty years anyway, Covid or no Covid.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, depression is the second leading cause of disability for Americans between the ages of 15 and 44.

During their lifetime, most Americans will experience acute depression at least three times. These would be most likely times 1. when the bottom falls out; 2. when everything heads south, and 3. when nothing seems right.

Studies have found that depression is closely linked to divorce, separation and the death of a loved one. Sadly, women are 70% more likely than men to experience depression. And, even more sadly, depression is involved in more than two-thirds of

the 35,000 suicides that occur in the United States every year. When we're depressed, it's tempting to self-medicate with too much alcohol, sexual escapades, more work, too much fantasy football or illegal business deals.

You name it and people have probably tried it. And we all know where quick-fixes end. **They end with more depression.**

B. Into this darkness Isaiah boldly announces, "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon YOU! For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you" **Isaiah 60:1-2.**

What an awesome burst of light!

In fact, Isaiah employs light imagery throughout chapter 60. The word "light," appears seven times in the chapter. Other "light" words are as follows: "shine" **Isaiah 60:1, 2, 3**; "brightness" **Isaiah 60:3**; "be radiant" **Isaiah 60:5**; "splendor" **Isaiah 60:7,19**; "beautify" **Isaiah 60:7,9,13**; "glory" **Isaiah 60:1,2,13**; "glorious" **Isaiah 60:13**; "sun" **Isaiah 60:19,20**; and "moon" **Isaiah 60:19,20.**

What a brilliant light show!

C. But it can get dark—very, very dark! Isaiah knows. **Isaiah 59** is one of the darkest chapters in the Bible. Take some time to read it and see what all is in there and you will learn to appreciate **Chapter 60!**

Words describing darkness, depression and death appear seventeen times in the first eight verses—**seventeen times!**

The list includes words like: iniquity, sin, defilement, deceit, wickedness, disorder, vanity, turmoil, violence, evil, destruction, devastation and crookedness.

The next verses go on to say that justice, salvation and righteousness are far, far away. **Isaiah 59:16** then announces that God is appalled because there is no one to intervene.

II. We all live in the world of Isaiah 59. It gets dark, very,

very dark! Then, just when we don't expect him, the Prince of Darkness shows up, pointing his accusing finger at us, mocking our feeble discipleship, our failed relationships and our fatal attractions.

A. But then, when you're in the dark, you have the Light! "Arise, shine, for your light has come!" Isaiah predicts and prepares the way for an even greater light show.

That's the message of Christ's birth. "An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them" **Luke 2:9**. Simeon celebrates, "A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel" **Luke 2:32**.

In **Matthew 2:2**, The magi marvel, "We have seen his star in the east and have come to worship him". What a dazzling light! God enters the world on the floor of a stable, through the womb of a teenager, in the presence of a carpenter.

B. Jesus is the Light of the world who took on flesh so that he might take you into his arms, heal your hurts, forgive your sin and destroy your darkness.

In him there is blazing, brilliant, eternal light.

John 1:5 states, "The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not overcome it." **Note the verb "shines." It's a present tense verb.** John doesn't write "the light shone" or "the light will shine." No, John writes, "The light **shines** in the darkness."

In your darkness; in your deep darkness; in the darkest hours of your life, **this light shines**. "The darkness has not overcome it."

With those last words John prepares us, even now during Advent, for Good Friday. Talk about a dark day! Nails. Blood. Sweat. Tears. Three hours of darkness! And then death.

Three days later, though, the light shines—present tense, shines! The darkness will never overcome Jesus. The darkness will never overcome you!

III. Not even death can extinguish this light! “Christ is risen!” Not risen from sleep. Not risen from confusion. Not risen from stupor or slumber. Not risen in the hearts of his followers.

No. Christ is risen from the dead—physically, bodily **and most certainly!** Stepping forth from the tomb, **Jesus radiates life and light!** Resurrection light befriends and beckons. It can never be broken.

A. In HIM we can do all things, we can survive all things...That is the gift of this season to celebrate!

God delivers us from the dominion of darkness and transfers us into the kingdom of light. When our evening comes, the night of death will yield to the dawn of an eternal Easter.

Then we will forever shine in divine splendor and bask in God’s eternal glory. In **Psalm 27**, David, in all of his despair, realizes that “The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?”...Though a war shall rise up against me, in spite of this I shall be confident!

Even the Energizer Bunny can’t say that!

And, there is more light to come!

When Christ returns, he promises to take us to the New Jerusalem where, according to **Revelation 22:5**, “There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God Almighty will give them light.”

Our best years have not passed. Our biggest moments are not long gone. Death is the first chapter of a story that has no end. **No end!**

Imagine that! We hear about this light. We sing about this light. I even preach about this light, but because sometimes it hurts so bad, we slip back into the dark.

B. Field of Dreams is a terrific movie. Do you remember the story? Ray Kinsella of Iowa turns a cornfield into a baseball field and long dead major league baseball players—including

Shoeless Joe Jackson of the Chicago White Sox—show up.

Ray's problem, though, is that the baseball players are invisible to almost everyone, and he's going bankrupt, much to the disgust of his brother-in-law, Mark.

Mark tells Ray (played by Kevin Costner), "Ray, you're going to lose your farm. You build a baseball field, and you sit here, and stare at nothing."

But suddenly, a traumatic incident changes Mark's vision and he does a 180, telling Ray he must not sell the farm. What happened? Mark could now see all the baseball players!

Mark was in the dark, but then he saw the light! Mark's story can be ours as well.

How so? "Arise, shine, for your light has come" (Isaiah 60:1). Jesus was born for us. He came to earn forgiveness for every sin, direction at every turn, light for every dark day, and an anchor for every deadly storm.

Jesus is too wise to make a mistake, too strong to crush and too merciful to ever cast us away. Light is God's good and perfect gift for you. **Don't miss it!**

We long for the fulfillment of these promises, but we must patiently wait for **God's timing**, just like those who waited for the coming of the Christ child.

That is what the Advent Season is all about. It is a time of waiting and self-inventory taking.

God is in control of history and like a tapestry we are each a thread to be woven into the bigger picture of the Kingdom.

During this Advent Season, let us look toward the light for the true light of the world!

Amen? Let Us Pray...