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Second Sunday of Epiphany
Sermons
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ISAIAH 49:1-7 - "LIGHT TO THE NATIONS"

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Light is a good thing; it enables us to see. Light from the Sun provides us with heat and energy that makes life on earth possible. Light brings about activity and good health. Light brings order to our days, months, and years. Light reveals what is hidden in shadows. Light always overcomes darkness; light a candle or night light in the dark of night and darkness flees, then sight is possible; then you won't stumble and fall over the things hidden in the darkness. Light is a good thing.

Light is a good gift and creation of God that brings order as well as heat, energy, and sight. *1:1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. 3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. 4 And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. Genesis 1:1-5.*

God is the only one in the beginning; there is no one else. There is nothing; creation, all things in the universe do not exist, just God alone. Verse 2 seeks to explain nothingness to people who only know the existence of God's creation- "without form, void, darkness, the deep, and waters" are all ancient Hebrew ways of expressing chaos, emptiness, nothing. In the beginning, the Spirit of God is hovering over the nothingness. And then God speaks; He proclaims His Word and that which He speaks comes to be from nothing and exists. God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. The light God created accomplished the very purposes for which God created it; the light overcame the darkness, the nothingness, and brought order and time. Light marked off the day from the night.

I pray it is clear already, but just to make sure; light defines, orders, and overcomes darkness and never the reverse. Darkness is nothingness; it is the absence of light; it is not a thing in itself. Darkness is never a good thing by itself, only as ordered and defined by the light does darkness serve a good purpose. Think about it. God called the light He created good, but He never called darkness good, because ultimately darkness is the absence of light, the absence of God's good created order.

When Adam and Eve sinned, they turned away from God' Word, the source of light and the good ordering of all creation. Through their disobedience darkness fell upon all of God's creation; God's good order had been corrupted and began to fall into chaos. The darkness of guilt and shame clouded Adam and Eve so that they tried to hide themselves from God in fear and tried to cover their nakedness. Physical death,

spiritual and moral corruption, and an increasing breaking down of order to chaos, to nothingness, to darkness, are the consequences that we live with even to this day. The nations are covered in darkness. We are covered in darkness. God's creation is covered in darkness.

The tragic events of Saturday January 1 in Alexandria, Egypt, of Wednesday January 5 here in Oakland, TN, and of Saturday January 8 in Tucson, AZ should make it clear that darkness still covers the nations to this day. Twenty one Coptic Christians were killed at church by an Islamic homicide bomber in Alexandria. A thirty four year old man from Oakland lost his life because something set off a series of explosions at the ammunition plant. Six people were gunned down in Arizona along with Congresswoman Giffords, who is still alive, one of whom was a nine year old girl who was born on September 11, 2001. All these events are tragic, because they resulted in the loss of human life which God created good, because they are a return to chaos, to nothingness, to darkness. We need some light in these dark times; light from God!

Light was needed in the days of Isaiah the prophet too. Darkness had clouded over the eyes of God's people, Israel, whom God had called to be a kingdom of priests to the nations. Israel was to pray for the nations in the darkness of paganism; Israel was to give witness to the great acts of Yahweh who created light and who rescued His people from bondage in Egypt; Israel was to pray for the nations and be an example so that wicked from the nations would repent and turn away from darkness to the glorious light of God, but alas in all this Israel failed. Israel did not reflect the light of Yahweh to the nations but instead participated in their deeds of darkness.

God sent His Word through Isaiah the prophet to bring light to the darkness that had covered the people of Israel. Isaiah called the people to repent from oppressing the least in their society, the poor, the widow, and the orphan; he called them to stop perverting justice, calling evil good and good evil. Isaiah told the people to return to the Law of the Lord, which instructed them to love their neighbors, and to stop being turned in upon themselves. Isaiah warned that the sacrifices to idols, to gods made by human hands, Baal, Ashteroth, and Moelech must end. Isaiah warned that God's wrath was coming through the might of Assyria and Babylon to lay waste to the promised land; God was going to allow darkness to come on the outside, because the hearts of His people were dark on the inside.

Isaiah declared to Israel that salvation from the present and coming darkness would not be found in themselves nor in their neighbors, but in Yahweh the God of Israel who brought them out of Egypt and in Yahweh's coming servant who would restore Israel to God and be a light to the nations. Isaiah 49:1-7 are God's Words of promise and light to Israel and the nations at time of great darkness:

1 Listen to me o coastlands and attend peoples from afar. Yahweh called me from the womb; from the belly of my mother He caused my name to be remembered. 2 And He set my mouth as a sharp sword. In the shadow of His hand He hid me; and He made me as a polished arrow; in His quiver He concealed me. 3 And He said to me, "You are My servant Israel in whom I will be glorified." 4 But I, I said, "I toiled in vain; my strength is finished for nothing and vanity; however my justice is with Yahweh and my wage is with my God." 5 And now Yahweh says, He who formed me from the womb to serve Him, to return Jacob to Him and Israel to be gathered to

Him. For I am honored in the eyes of Yahweh and my God has become my strength. 6 And He said, "It is too easy for you My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to return the preserved of Israel. But I will set you as a light for the nations to be My salvation unto the end of the earth." 7 Thus says Yahweh the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one despised, abhorred by the nation, the servant of rulers, "Kings will see and arise, princes shall bow down; because Yahweh who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, also He has chosen you."

These words of God spoken by Isaiah the prophet promise and foretell the coming of Yahweh's servant, Israel reduced to One, the Christ, Jesus the Light of the world. Can there be anyone else, could Isaiah be speaking of another servant besides Jesus? Not according to the witness of the New Testament!

Luke 2:29-32 records the words which Simeon spoke upon seeing the baby Jesus presented in the Temple, the words of the NUNC DIMITTIS which we pray every week after the Lord's Supper:

*9 "Lord, now You are letting your servant depart in peace,
according to Your word;
30 for my eyes have seen Your salvation
31 that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and for glory to Your people Israel."*

Jesus, Himself said, "*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life*" (John 8:12). And St. Paul declared while on trial before King Agrippa concerning Jesus, "that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, He would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:23). It is with good reason then, that Isaiah is often referred to as the 5th Gospel, for the Good News of Christ is proclaimed so clearly! Jesus is the servant of Yahweh spoken of here in Isaiah. Yahweh called him from the womb of his mother, from his conception and birth into His service, a service to return Israel to the Lord and to be a light to the nations, a service that ended in rejection and death. Yahweh has indeed caused the name of His servant Jesus to be remembered throughout all the earth. Multitudes of people call upon His name for forgiveness and salvation, and in prayer and praise to the God of Israel.

Jesus is the Light, that God promised through Isaiah to the people of Israel in their darkness. Jesus is the Light of the world come to the nations who are covered in darkness. Jesus endured rejection, a laboring in vain in Israel in order to redeem and return Israel to God. Jesus was pierced by the darkness on the cross for all covered in darkness and in His resurrection Jesus pierced the darkness in turn. Remember Jesus' resurrection was on a Sunday, the first day of the week, the first day of creation, when God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. Jesus is indeed the Light of the world! The new creation has begun in His resurrection from the dead, bringing light, life, and good order to all that has been darkened, corrupted, and thrown into chaos by sin.

The new creation has come in Christ Jesus; Light has returned to overcome the darkness, the chaos, the nothingness as it was in the beginning, and yet the old

creation still remains clouded in the darkness of sin and death. All creation, our bodies and minds, all upon the earth yet long for the day when the Jesus the Light of the nations shall return in the full glory of the Father and make all things new. Now darkness still lingers all around us. The tragic happenings of January 1st, 5th, and 8th are a reminder of the present darkness. But even worse the darkness is in and amongst even us.

Darkness is not only present in this world through the hordes of the devil that seek to destroy all that God has created and disrupt His good order. Darkness, deadly, pitch black darkness lies in your heart and mind and has spread to your whole body and being. From the darkness of your heart come ungodly thoughts, hateful words, and reckless actions. The darkness within each of us has turned us inward and leads us to serve the false gods of money, possessions, power, and popularity. We remain in the dark, unaware of this darkness within us until the Word of God enlightens us and sets us free.

Apart from God's Word, which reveals the depth of our darkness and brings to us the Light of Christ, we remain in the dark. Apart from God's Word we will only see darkness in other people and things, but never in ourselves. Apart from the light of God's Word we will continue to put the blame for tragedies and evils of all sorts upon others instead of where it belongs, like the sheriff in AZ who strangely was trying to shift the guilt for the AZ shootings upon the rhetoric in the media, instead of keeping it upon the man who pulled the trigger.

Bothers and sisters, you need not fear the darkness in the world nor the darkness you find within you, for Jesus Christ the Light to the nations has enlightened you with His Word! Jesus, the Servant of Yahweh, was pierced with your darkness on the cross and now in the power of His resurrection in the Word He is piercing your darkness and setting you free in His glorious light! God spoke and promised long ago through His prophet Isaiah: "It is too easy for you My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to return the preserved of Israel. But I will set you as a light for the nations to be My salvation unto the end of the earth." Christ the Light of the nations has come; God's promise has been fulfilled! Christ the Light of the nations comes bringing God's salvation through water and Word, body and blood, and His Word spoken and read; He comes to enlighten you and set you free from the darkness. Christ comes now in this way, so that at His final coming you might be raised to live in the glorious Light of the new creation, Amen.