



The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany
February 9, 2020
The Rev. Dr. Christian Brocato, Rector

+O God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our Strength and Redeemer. Amen.

Powerful words from Isaiah this morning. The Israelites had returned to Jerusalem from captivity in Babylon and struggled to shape their restored lives in Jerusalem: “8 Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly... the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. 9 Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and God will say, ‘Here I am.’”

Today’s passage continues to remind us of the primary theme of Epiphany, the theme of light, light that shatters darkness, light that we really cannot escape. The light of God in Jesus is an all-encompassing light. There are no shadows, just light.

Growing up in an older house with large rooms and high ceilings, beautiful hardwood floors and very dark stained woodwork, I had to go through several rooms to get to the family room. My bedroom was at one end of the house.

After dark for me to get from my bedroom to the family room, I had to make a little journey. I would leave my room, go down a hallway, walk through a corner of the formal living room, pass through the dining room and then I would arrive in the family room.

As often as I would turn lights on, my father would go behind me and turn lights off. I didn’t like the darkness. There had to be a little night light in the hallway, and now as an adult, I can’t sleep if there is light.

What is it about darkness and light, contrasting elements of creation, which call us to different types of awareness of our surroundings? How often this winter have we complained about days and days without sun? How joyous are we when there is even a day of partial sun?

When the sun shines brightly, it shines on all, the good and the not so good alike. The theme of light in Epiphany and other seasons such as Easter is important in our relationship with God and God’s relationship with us. Isaiah reminds us that God is with us. God says, “Here I am” in verse 9 of today’s reading.

God’s “Here I am” is an active, dynamic and all-encompassing statement of presence without limitations. God’s “Here I am” is a profound open door from God. We are called to respond in kind. The Letter to the Hebrews give us the language: “Here I am, O God. I have come to do your will”. (Hebrews 10:9) God’s invitation and our response paves the way for partnership, a partnership in love.

A commentator on today’s passage offers the following: “To confirm the partnership of God with God's people. Isaiah reminds us that this is a God who a) wants more than a formal relationship with the people, b) expects us to be partners in bringing forth God's purposes and c) is responsive to our choices. The good news is that God calls us, again and again, into God's own life.” (Amy Ogden at https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4374) When we respond to this partnership with God, we can more fully experience the light which is ours in Jesus in remarkable and life-giving ways.

Today, we will offer a prayer of blessing for the Vestry of the Parish. We celebrate those who continue to serve on the Vestry and those who were elected at last week's Annual Meeting. God has called these twelve women and men into partnership with God in service to God and God's people at St. Mark's. That call to partnership is a call to respond to God's voice within them.

The Vestry's ministry is important in the Episcopal Tradition. I invite you to keep the Vestry in your prayers, weekly offerings of praying for them and their ministry. Their call and all those who serve in the many ministries of St. Mark's is a holy call, as it involves the sacred, God.

Our call to follow in the footsteps of Jesus is a holy call to relationship, to partnership, to companionship and to light. We have the capacity to walk in the light of Jesus, to be bearers of that light to others and to be salt for the world in need of healthy seasoning. We have the capacity to be responsive to the truth of the Judeo-Christian Tradition.

Today's Gospel is part of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus builds on the "law and the prophets" and challenges us to be attentive to God who calls by name. We are God's creatures, and God's DNA, if you will, is within us, enabling us to do much good in the world.

This week in our world, we saw the breakdown of the Iowa caucuses because of a phone app and other reasons. Months of preparations were sent into a kind of tailspin. We saw the spread of the Coronavirus and the State-of-the-Union address and responses to it. These are aspects of the world in which we find ourselves.

We know that as Christians we don't live in a vacuum apart from the world. Jesus lived fully present in the world of the First Century. He sought to make that world a better place especially for those with little voice or little opportunity in life.

In 2020 and with God's help, we have opportunities to make the world a better place. The Gospel of Jesus calls us to make a difference. It calls us to a change of heart and ultimately to be people of "righteousness".

'Righteousness' is a word not easily defined. To be 'righteous' before God means to do all we can for the common good. It means to be people of justice, people of forgiveness, people of mercy and people who strive to fulfill the desire of God for us to be light to the world. We have God's grace to make that a reality in our individual lives and the life of St. Mark's. (See: <https://www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com/how-does-the-bible-define-righteousness/>)

As Christians, we are called to partner with God as God's agents in the world. We are called to stand with Jesus and all for which Jesus stood in life and for which he gave his life. How we respond to that partnership is up to each of us and to us as a community.

Join with me in prayer "Here *we* are, O God. We have come to do your will. Help us to shape the world as you would have it, a world of truth, compassion, justice and love." Amen.