

“God’s Vision – share it!” A sermon by Lee Ireland  
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church  
January 22, 2017 Third Sunday after Epiphany  
Isaiah 9: 1-4

Prayer: Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.

As I read these verses from Isaiah, I couldn’t help but be reminded of the story Luke tells in Chapter 24 about Jesus talking to Cleopas and his traveling partner as they walked with heavy hearts the seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus after Jesus’ crucifixion. They thought Jesus was the Messiah, “the one to redeem Israel,” and they couldn’t understand why Jesus had been condemned to death and crucified. Their hearts were downcast. Yet, they had heard some of the women in the group had seen a vision of angels who said that Jesus was alive.

As they walked along, Jesus joined them, but they didn’t recognize him. When they shared the sorrow they felt over Jesus’ death, Jesus – whom they still did not recognize - said to them, **“Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?”** Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. (Luke 25:25-27)

I imagine that Jesus used these verses from Isaiah that I read to you today as **he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.** Jesus knew these Old Testament verses from Isaiah and used the image they evoked in the listener to help people understand he was the Messiah. In fact, in John’s biography of Jesus, Jesus is quoted as saying, **“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”** (John 8:12)

These verses from Isaiah point us to Jesus as the Messiah, the one who brought light to the world, illuminating our paths so we can live, love and service as Jesus did.

What does this imagery about light mean? The Bible is full of references to God being the light to the world; of darkness representing evil and light representing good. Jesus came into the world to show us how to live, to conquer evil, to liberate us from following our sinful desires for our lives. Jesus showed us how to live following God’s desires for our lives, the show us the light, the right path. Jesus’ light also liberates society from divisions that separate us from each other.

As Christians, we can look at this liberation as both personal and communal. First, personal. Belief in Christ brings each of us spiritual liberation. We are liberated from evil, from sin, and are no longer bound to live a life that conforms to the ways of the

world, but conforms to God's ways. That's quite freeing – liberating. We are freed to respond to the grace, the good news, that God offers to each of us.

Second, communal. God's light in Jesus liberates society from its self-imposed divisions. Paul reminds us in Galatians 3:28: **There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.** One in Christ, that's really the topic of our First Corinthians reading from today: no divisions, but one in Christ.

This light, this Jesus, liberates each of us, frees each of us and transforms us into a new creation to carry out the work of God here on earth.

Does anyone remember what happened on Friday? Let me be more specific – what happened on Friday in Washington, DC? Yes, there was a swearing in of a new president. But there were also arrests. Numbers of people were arrested for protesting. What were they protesting? Their causes varied. You may have been sympathetic to some of the causes and not to others. You may have thought none of the protesters should have been there. Some may have been Christians standing up for their beliefs. They were motivated by their belief in Christ and were following his teachings. Others may have not been motivated by Christ. I don't know the motivations of the people on that day or the motivations of those that protested over the weekend.

What I do want to know today is what is your motivation as you live your life each day. I hope your motivation for living in this world involves living as Christ would have you live, working to change the world. Each of us, in our own way, needs to point out to the world that Jesus is the light of the world. Each of us needs to point to Jesus' liberation of society. And each of us, freed and transformed, needs to carry out God's work here on earth.

What does Isaiah say about that work? We are to increase the world's joy, to rejoice as if we'd harvested an abundant crop. We are to break the rod of the oppressor and share the burdens of those less fortunate. That's our job as Christ-followers.

You and I, like Isaiah, are to see beyond today's problems and work towards God's vision of a future where all are equal. We are to imagine a life as things are in God's world. We are not to lower our sights nor conform to society's expectations. We are not to get comfortable with the status quo. We need to imagine and work toward a world where war is not the norm, where the captives are set free, where the burdens of the oppressed are lifted.

There will always be a need for a prophetic voice to stand in the halls of power and tell of a vision of a world living in peace and harmony, where the poor are cared for. There is a need for a voice that says there's another way to live.

You've all heard or read Proverbs 29:18 - **Where there is no prophecy, the people cast off restraint, but happy are those who keep the law.** You may know this Proverb in fewer words: without a vision the people perish.

As Christians, we are to tell of God's vision for our world. The people of the world desperately need that vision. It's not an easy job. You may lose a few friends. You may make a few friends. That's not what's important. What's important – that you do the work Christ-followers are called to do. You'll find freedom and liberation in doing so. In today's newspaper, there was a picture of a protester who held a sign that said, 'Democracy is not a spectator sport.' We can rewrite that sign and say that, 'Christianity is not a spectator sport.' We need to be involved doing Christ's work here on earth.

Isaiah spoke to a people of long ago. He speaks to us today. Each of us, in our own way, need to point out to the world that Jesus is the light of the world. Each of us needs to point to Jesus' liberation of society. And each of us, freed and transformed, needs to carry out God's work here on earth.

What are the new possibilities that you're passionate about? What skills has God given you to proclaim Jesus as the light of the world?

Back to those two who walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus. Do you remember what Cleopas and his partner did after they had encountered the risen Christ? Yes, they got up from the table and immediately, in the middle of the night, headed back to Jerusalem to spread the news that Jesus, the light of the world, was alive. May you be as excited as they were and spread the news of liberation that the resurrected Jesus, the light of the world, proclaims. The people who have walked in darkness have indeed seen a great light!