

Time to Shine

Isaiah 60:1-6

January 3, 2021

First Presbyterian Church, Luling

My friend Candy is a scuba diver. She recently went on a scuba diving trip to Belize. They dove for several days, and then they also did a dive at night. I'm not sure what would possess a person to do such a thing, but she claims it is fun and relaxing. Diving at night, she explained to me, is way different than diving during the day. Obviously, during the day, there is light coming from above, so you know which way is up, literally, and you can see your diving partner. Since there's a breathing mouthpiece in your mouth, and it's hard to speak underwater anyway, scuba divers have created a system of hand signals, like sign language, to communicate with each other while underwater. At night, that's more difficult, because it's dark and hands aren't visible.

Now each diver has a light. I'm not clear if it's like a headlamp or a flashlight that they carry in their hand, but everyone has a light. Candy said the temptation is to shine the light at your diving partner, when you're trying to tell them something or show them something. It makes sense. What do we do when we're directing a comment toward someone? We look at them. But all that does is shine the light right in their face and blinds them. They can't see you, your hands so they know what you're trying to say, or the thing you're trying to show them. The temptation is to shine the light at the wrong thing altogether.

Instead, you have to shine your light on yourself—not on your face, but on your hands, so that your dive partner can see what message you're trying to convey. You have to shine your light in the right spot, or you have the opposite effect of what you've intended.

A couple of points that may seem obvious but will become important in minute. The scuba diver does not create the light. She carries it and has the opportunity to shine it or not, and the ability to decide where to shine it, but she does not make the light. And when the scuba diver shines the light, its purpose is to communicate, to say something, to show something. It's not shining for its own sake but for the sake of connecting with another person.

"Arise! Shine!" Isaiah commands. "For your light has come." Isaiah was prophesying to a people who didn't feel very up and at 'em or very shiny. They had been exiled out of their land for several generations. Then a few of them had been given permission to return, but they had come home to a land that was

destroyed, a Temple that was in ruins, still without any political power or influence, economic uncertainty, doom and gloom. They were divided among themselves, as people sometimes do when they face an enemy that is too powerful to conquer. Despair and desolation and discouragement hung over them like the thick darkness, a layer of clouds obscuring the sun.

Maybe you've felt like that. Maybe we've all felt like that together. Maybe we all feel like that a bit right now.

But what does Isaiah say? "Arise! Shine! For your light has come! And the glory of the Lord has risen upon you." Arise and shine are commands there. And then there's two more commands a few verses later: "Lift up your eyes and look around."

The light has come. The glory of the Lord—that is, the presence of the Lord—is here. God is with us. The light of the world is here. We don't have to create the light or produce the light or even muster up rise and shiny feelings. Because the light isn't ours. It comes from God, and it belongs to God. The light is here. Scuba divers don't have to make the light, and neither do we. God created light on the first day of creation, and that light belongs to God, who gives it to us.

In this poem, Isaiah is instructing—commanding—the people to shine the light that God has given them, and then all of the exiles who are still far away, and even people who were foreigners, would see the light and come to their land and their city. They would bring riches and people and things would be even better than before.

Isaiah's people are supposed to rise and shine and lift up their eyes from despair and look around for the same reason the scuba divers do—to tell somebody something, to show somebody something, to connect with other people and share an experience together. The scuba diver is showing his friend an unusual fish, and Isaiah's people are showing the world that they are still there, that they are still God's people, that the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. They're shining the light of God to communicate their hope to the world. They're shining their light on what they need the world to see. On what God needs the world to see.

That star in the sky that the wise men followed was shining on what God needs the world to see. They saw the light, realized what the light was shining on, and followed it to see. They brought themselves and their riches, to proclaim the praise of the Lord, as Isaiah promised.

Isaiah's words didn't come true immediately, and they didn't come true as the people had expected. Their new normal was different than the old normal.

Riches did not come pouring in from all over the place. But they shined their light as best they could. They lifted up their eyes from the discouragement and desolation and looked around to see all that was good. And they shined God's light to send the message that God is real and present, a help in trouble, and that God never abandons us. And we shine that same light and communicate that same message, as best we can.