

2022 01 09 – Light in the Shadows

Matthew 2:1-12

Isaiah 60:1-6 (The Inclusive Bible)

Yesterday morning I was sitting beside my Christmas tree looking at the sparkling lights and thinking about how much I have enjoyed my tree and the other decorations in my home this year. I was noticing them especially because I knew they were coming down a few hours later. And as I looked at the multi-coloured lights on my tree a quote from Brené Brown came into my mind. While contemplating the tiny white lights strung in her home, Ms Brown had written:

Twinkle lights are the perfect metaphor for joy. Joy is not a constant. It comes to us in moments—often ordinary moments. Sometimes we miss out on the bursts of joy because we're too busy chasing down extraordinary moments. Other times we're so afraid of the dark that we don't dare let ourselves enjoy the light.

<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/8048747-twinkle-lights-are-the-perfect-metaphor-for-joy-joy-is>

As I thought about Brené Brown's words I realized that the main reason I enjoyed the lights on my Christmas tree so much this year was because I didn't get to travel to visit my family over the holidays. I had made plans to see my sisters in Calgary, but one of my nieces tested positive for COVID-19 and those plans were derailed. I know I'm not the only one whose plans got changed over Christmas and with the Omicron variant running rampant here in Saskatchewan and around the world, plans are changing everywhere. We are all being impacted. Some days it feels like the shadowy presence of this pandemic is never going to end.

Of course we are also in the middle of winter. The time of year when the days are short and we often drive to work (and back) in the dark. Another reason that

I enjoyed my tree so much this year was that I was inside more than usual. With the holidays came frigid temperatures and days when the wind chill reached record lows. I wasn't able to spend my days snowshoeing or walking the trails in the park. Instead I was often sitting on my couch by the tree reading a book or watching a movie or working on a project on my computer.

COVID-19 and frigid temperatures meant that my holidays were not what I expected. Yes, I was disappointed, but I know that many of you are struggling with issues that are much more challenging. Some of you are dealing with loss, others with mental or physical illness and still others with financial worries and the stress of major changes in your lives. No doubt, it feels as if the shadows are closing in.

That's exactly how the people of Israel were feeling when the ancient prophet spoke the words that Pat read for us this morning. In fact, in the previous chapter of the book of Isaiah, the Israelites are crying out in despair saying,

We look for the light but see only darkness;
we wait for brightness but walk in deep shadows.
We search for justice to no avail;
for deliverance, but it is too far away.
(Isaiah 59: 9b, 11b)

The people of Israel are struggling with oppression and injustice, with violence and sickness, with loss and lies.

And, in the midst of this dark period in their lives, the prophet speaks words of encouragement saying,

Arise, shine for your light has come!
The glory of YHWH is rising upon you!
Though darkness still covers the earth
And dense clouds enshroud the people,
Upon you YHWH now dawns,
And God's glory will be seen among you!

The prophet is telling his people that the light is here, that the light of dawn is rising at this very moment. But he also recognizes that the Israelites are still living in the cold of winter, in the dense cloud of pain, in the darkness of despair. So he tells them, "Lift your eyes, and look around."

This prophet is telling his people and us that the light is here in the shadows if we allow ourselves to see it. It may be fleeting. It may just be a momentary twinkle but it is here. In the disappointment of my Christmas holidays, I found joy in a brightly lit tree, in listening to Christmas music, in spending time with a good friend, in shovelling snow for a neighbour. I know some of you were able to visit with family this Christmas and maybe found joy in holding a new born baby or hugging someone that you hadn't seen for a long time.

The light is here in the shadows if we allow ourselves to see it. Sometimes that light feels less like joy and more like hope. Yes it is still dark, but at this time of year I find hope in the knowledge that every morning the sun arrives a little earlier and every night it goes down a little later. I find hope in the fact that after nearly two years, the Omicron variant may actually bring us closer to the end of this

pandemic. I find hope in the knowledge that I am not alone, that God is with me and that I am surrounded by this caring congregation.

The light is here in the shadows if we allow ourselves to see it. Sometimes that light is not so much joy or hope but rather inspiration or even challenge. The astrologers from the east saw a light in the sky and believed that it was the sign of the birth of a Jewish King. The Magi were so inspired by the star that they decided to follow it so that they could meet this royal child for themselves.

It is often in the dark or shadowy times of our lives that we see the light of epiphany. It is often in those times that we recognize the presence of the holy and are inspired to go on a different path in our lives. I want to end today with a poem by Andrew King. This is a poem that connects the journey of the astrologers, with our own personal journey to see, to discern and then to follow the light of Christ, the guiding Spirit of God. The poem is called *The Star Signal*

Not every journey toward the Christ
starts like the magi's in darkness,

but there might come
a time when, in the empty hours
of an otherwise unremarkable night,
you have happened to look up at the usual sky,
and noticed, almost by accident, between
passages of gray beasts of slow-moving cloud
the bright bloom of a strange star flowering,

and something begins to open a little
somewhere beneath your skin,
as if that new wedge of light in the sky
had inserted itself into your soul,

not enough to cause you any hurt, but just
enough that you feel a pang, the twinge
of something like longing, as if your eyes

in the silence have become ears
in the darkness, and you are hearing
a holy summons,
distant but ringing like a silver trumpet
in the chambers of your listening heart,

and you gaze at that star where it stands
in the sky dropping dust on the night horizon,
and you think it might be signalling
a holy Presence in the world
and a road you can take to meet it,

and that such a road, lit with such promise,
might lead to a great adventure,
where life becomes challenged
and changed and as new as the sky
above a better world.

And so you pack, and you leave
on this journey, this journey
where Christ is not only waiting
but walking your road at your side,

and you follow that light
as it closes the distance,
as it reaches deep within you,
touching gifts
you carry in your hand.

<https://earth2earth.wordpress.com/2014/12/28/poem-for-the-sunday-lectionary-sunday-of-the-epiphany-yr-b/>

The light is here in the shadows if we allow ourselves to see it. A twinkle of light
to give us joy. A beacon of hope to keep us going in the dark of winter. A
glimpse of dawn to brighten our world. A sacred star for us to follow.

May it be so. Amen.