

Light in Dark Times
Isaiah 9:1-4; Matthew 4:12-23
Epiphany 3A St Thomas's Church 2017

As my children won't hesitate to tell you,
when it comes to getting on board the world of technology.
I am a troglodyte...
not just slow - but glacial –
I have found it too often time-wasting, distracting, overwhelming,
and in my line of work, much of the time unnecessary.
I thought I had done just fine till now without 600 apps
So I ignored it – and got behind – way behind in learning
its true value and how to use it well...
so far behind I was embarrassed to ask for help
and my grandkids are too far away to be useful.

My life changed 2 weeks ago when David and I drove to Atlanta
where he will be teaching at Emory for the semester.
A friend put WAZE on my phone to get us there.
For those of you who don't know, WAZE is an app
that will tell you how to get anywhere.

It corrects your route when you go wrong
and even tells you when there are cops ahead.

Best of all it's EASY! Even I can use it!

We got to depend on the voice of WAZE very quickly.

She saved us when we heard the weather report
about the snow/ice storm coming across the south
and we had to abruptly change our driving plans
if we didn't want to get snowed in somewhere in South Carolina.

We drove and drove and drove south from DC
towards Atlanta on the fringe of
the freezing rain that was part of the storm
we were trying to outrun.

It was dark by 4 pm and seeing out the windows
became increasingly difficult.

We were vulnerable, exposed and somewhat unnerved.

This is not what we had planned – or what we expected.

WAZE was our voice of certainty,
our guide in the storm,

the voice of calm that guided us,
set us straight when we went wrong
and moved us from the darkness to a place of light and safety...
and a new adventure.

How many times have each of us individually
and all of us collectively
found ourselves in a place of deep darkness
feeling overwhelmed, anxious and unnerved
even terrified by the icy world around us.

For many of us, we are living in such a time right now.

But we are hardly the first people to have this experience.

Surely this was the case for beleaguered Israel
in the 8th c when the Assyrian armies wielded their strength
and worked their will against the defenseless
and helpless and ill equipped people of the Northern kingdom.
It was a dark time for them
when Isaiah prophesied :
the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

Those who lived in a land of deep darkness, on them light has shined.

What light? Though many people today believe that Isaiah prophesied the coming of Christ,

most commentators agree that all we can say for sure is this:

the “light” to which the prophet refers

is the light which is the power of God...

the power which creates possibilities that didn't exist,

the light which guides the way through storms on unfamiliar roads

and brings the vulnerable to a place of safety

which is hope for salvation.

For the Israelites, according to theologian Walter Bruggeman,

this concretely meant the military transformation which would end

the threat of Assyrian occupation.

It meant the belief in the power of Yahweh to create well-being

for those in jeopardy through a new Jerusalem king.

This was not the first time the Israelites were threatened.

They were under threat when captive to the Egyptians

and finally led through the Red Sea to freedom.

They had lived through the Babylonian captivity in the 6th c

THIS was not the first time and it would not be the last.

But Isaiah's prophecy was – and remains - like the voice of WAZE

the people who lived in darkness have seen a great light.

This was their hope in all things at all times.

In this new, unprecedented, stormy, anxious and uncertain time

in our own American history,

it is good to remember that we, too, have been through dark times before.

times of war (WWI, WWII, Korea, Vietnam, Iraq)

times of economic change (great depression, great recession)

times of weak and controversial leadership,

dark, fearful, uncertain, anxious times.

For those of you who are anxious now, you are not alone.

The latest polls show an astounding number

of respondents uncertain and fearful of the future.

But again – we have been in dark times before

and chances are we will be again.

The passage from Isaiah is important for US
because as was true for the people of the northern kingdom of Israel,
it is about more than dreaming about better days ahead.
It is about holding the light of hope
in the power of God
when living under a sense of threat and even doom
in a world beyond our control...
a world which seems to have fallen into the hands of leaders
who make ill-informed, selfish, sometimes unwise decisions...
leaders for whom God seems not to be a part of their lives.

**Our challenge now as Christians is to not allow ourselves
to grow accustomed to walking around in the dark.**

We who may now find ourselves walking in darkness
have seen a great light,
not a Jerusalem king but the son of God
the light Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ who came among us as one of the forgotten,
an immigrant, born to an unwed and poor mother

seemingly a powerless person.

Our passage from Matthew reminds us that in his ministry,
Jesus nonetheless stood in the face of the evils of hunger,
blindness, poverty and death –

healing, feeding, restoring, bringing new life
inaugurating GOD'S kingdom on earth..

He stood in the face of the systemic evil
that violates any person or group of people.

And when the political and religious powers that reigned
put him to death, it was an end – but not THE end.

He rose again, love defeating death, light obliterating darkness.

If you fear that the Christ light has been extinguished -
or if you're puzzled about what that light looks like today,
consider this:

the light of Christ looks like works of justice, mercy and kindness.

it looks like the millions who turned out

across the country for this weekend's marches and rallies

standing for and demanding human rights.

It looks like protesting the obscuring of truth,
and the ignoring news organizations whose reporters
don't say the right thing.

It looks like resisting the filling of the swamp with billionaires,
and community organizing on behalf of society's powerless,

It looks like the Black Lives Matter movement,
and the hard work of eliminating racial profiling
improving community policing,
and reducing unjust and unduly long prison sentences.

It looks like the sanctuary movement in cities and schools across the US.
and refugee resettlement as individuals and communities
open their hearts and homes to traumatized immigrants
looking only for peace and security.

It does not look like misogyny.

or demeaning people with disabilities.

or spending billions of dollars

to build a wall to keep our neighbors out.

It does not look like jeopardizing health care for millions.

or refusing a decent minimum wage for millions of workers.

The great light of Christ we see every day looks like ordinary people

called as Peter and Andrew, James and John were called –

called as they are / from where they are / to be who they are

ordinary people called to stand in solidarity and protest

refusing to be complicit in the sin of evil and harm

ordinary people called by the power of God to do extraordinary things,

to BE the light of hope in the darkness.

We are ALL invited to follow Jesus – or I should say commanded.

After all Jesus did not say

“I wonder if you would consider the possibility of tagging along

if you have the time and it is not too inconvenient.”

He did not invite us to text or twitter our opinions

to a nameless public.

He invited personal encounters PRAYER and healing.

He invited listening to the other with open hearts and minds

trying to stand in their shoes,
not automatically angrily disagreeing
if the song the other sings is not your song.

It is Jesus, after all, who is at the center of the wheel of our lives
and there will be differing points of view depending
on where one stands.

Now more than ever we need to step out IN faith,
to step out ON faith...ABOVE ALL TO STEP OUT....
especially in this uncertain time,
when the way ahead is unclear
and the weather around us can often feel like freezing rain.

To follow Jesus means discipleship – and
discipleship requires holding fast to Jesus
the WAZE who directs our life and reorients us when we get off the path.

Discipleship requires **active participation** in the struggle
for human rights and justice for all people.

Discipleship is the way to turn our despair into hope
through prayer and action.

This is not to get into magic thinking.

Light doesn't always dispel the darkness
but it DOES dispel the fear of the darkness.

In the same way Jesus' presence with us
doesn't always change the circumstances that create the fear
in the immediate moment in time.

But God's presence and power in the world of God's creation,
in Jesus present among us
in the power of the Holy Spirit
does lift the cloud of fear and anxiety
and reminds us that **God** –
not whatever partisan activity may be around us –
is the ultimate truth of our lives.

So if you are in a time of darkness
know you are not alone,
don't be embarrassed if you feel alone and afraid
ask a friend for the help when you need it
Pray and strategize together.

Keep your Jesus app open so you walk in WAZE of Christ

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light

He is our light – and he is our salvation. AMEN

Julie Kelsey

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