

Arise, Shine. Is your light shining?

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Life is not always easy, we all know that. For many of us there are relatively minor ups and downs, and those issues that some people call “first world problems”. For others there are catastrophic life events, from war, genocide, slavery, cancer, living with racism, discrimination and disempowerment.

Our reading from Isaiah today points to a very specific time in the history of the people of Israel and their struggles for their human rights.

The people of Israel had had a few rocky times during their history.

And they weren't always faithful, they lost their way many times, which may be why they wandered for 40 years in the desert when Google Maps said it should have only taken 11 days, or perhaps it was because they didn't want to ask for directions.

The book of Isaiah tells the story of the people of Israel over a significant period of time, perhaps as long as 600 years. It tells of Israel's journey and their relationship with God and with one another.

Isaiah contains warning and promises, encouragements and chastisement.

Around the year 596 BC the people of Israel were exiled to Babylon and remained there for about 60 years. Enslaved and subjugate, forbidden at times to worship God. This wasn't just a time away from their homeland, it was a time exiled from their God. The temple was destroyed and the Ark of the Covenant, where it was believed was where God resided in the Holy of Holies was taken.

The People of Israel were not perfect, but in many ways, they reflect the dynamics of any faith community. Sometimes faithful, sometimes limited in their outlook, sometimes prejudicial and introspective, sometimes abusive to others, they were definitely not perfect.

However, In reading scripture, the people of Israel represent the faithful people of God, they represent all faith communities including our own

Our reading today describes the time when Israel returns to Jerusalem to rebuild their nation, to bring back that light, which for many years had remained in darkness.

For many years they were forsaken, living in desolation, but now they had the opportunity to let their light shine again.

This light was not just one of the tradition and the rituals and practice of their faith, but more importantly one of justice, of peace and of kindness and love.

The images of a wedding are prominent here as they are in many parts of scripture, representing the commitment of God to God's people, of joy and celebration, of the

consummate image of a celebration representing what it feels like when a community is in a meaningful relationship with God.

The reestablishment of Jerusalem is not just one where the physical foundations of the building are lifted up again and the temple is rebuilt.

The reestablishment of the people in their homeland needed to build upon the words of the Prophets.

The light of God shining through the people is one where the people hear and respond to the words of the prophets, of the words of God.

This light reveals how we respond to God.

In Isaiah we read

“look to do good, seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow” (Is 1:17)

They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, nation shall not lift up sword against nation neither shall they learn war any more” Is 2:4)

Micah 6:8. “ and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God”

Amos 5:24 But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream

Amos 5:14 “Seek good and not evil that you may live, and so the Lord, the God of hosts will be with you... Hate evil and love good and establish justice in the gate...

Hosea 6:6 For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offering.

Can you see where this light of God is expected to shine?

Isaiah directs the people to shine

Oh house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord” (Is 2:5)

Is 60

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the lord has risen upon you.

We, all of us, you and me, live in the light, right now, through the power of the Holy Spirit

Our light has come, but how are we going to respond?

Do we stay in our comfortable temple, or do we also go out and let our light shine?

This is the light that was given to us at our baptism, remember?

“Receive this light as a symbol of the light of light of Christ that shines in your heart.”

I know that for many, we feel as if we are living in a world of darkness, but it is our responsibility to make sure this light continues to shine.

So often we leave our lights under a basket, or our lamps like the waiting bridesmaids are left without oil and our light falls dim.

At this time in the life of our country and the world we need to let our light shine.

As we remember the Martin Luther King, remember his words

"Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. MLK

Now is the time to stand up for our faith, to stand up for the basic human rights of our sisters and brothers in the USA and around the world.

I was reading yesterday about the brave citizens of Sudan who have been protesting against their unjust government, while facing armed police and military. They are risking their lives to stand up for their human rights, and some have died for lifting up and putting the light of God, of Human rights in front of the government.

Last week I saw an inspiring documentary about Venezuelan refugees entering in to Colombia with about 1.2 million so far. Families have opened up their homes to these refugees. The government is struggling but are providing health care and education for the children.

The Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem support the Al Ahli Arab Hospital, in Gaza, where despite the US government cutting their support many staff are working sacrificially to support their muslim sisters and brothers.

In the DRC the Dioceses in the North East of the country are providing support for internally displaced people, to at risk women in a country with the highest incidents of rape in the world. The church is a beacon of light for the surrounding communities.

How are we standing up for Syrian refugees?

How are we responding to the needs of our sisters and brothers in Central America?

How are we responding to the ongoing prejudice and racism against people of color, of the increasing anti-Semitism in our society?

When our light shines in our community and in our world, we experience the wedding of all weddings, we experience life as a celebration, like that of the wedding at Cana where the celebration continues and there is no shortage of resources.

What is Jesus telling us to do?

How are we being nudged by Mary's story.

I love that little vignette in the Cana story, where despite Jesus saying it is not my time, Mary ignores what Jesus is saying and just asks for the hosts to "do whatever he tells you".

We all know what Jesus wants us to do.

Through our baptism, we have been renamed, filled with the light of the Holy Spirit and given our orders.

All we have to do is shine.