

Last week we looked at Amos the first prophet that we have written words for. Today we take a look at Isaiah. Isaiah, means Yahweh is Salvation, was a southern kingdom prophet for 50 years from 740-681 BCE. During this time the Northern kingdom will be conquered by the Assyrians. Thus there is a foreign army on their doorsteps. This creates great uncertainty about the future of the southern kingdom Judah. Last week I talked about the phrase"

**Afflict the Comfortable
Comfort the Afflicted**

Isaiah will do some afflicting. The southern kingdom has some of the same problems of the North. The people are acting outside of God's desires. They also are a kingdom under great distress. Isaiah will also do some comforting. It is these words of comfort that makes Isaiah the most popular prophet to read. So the people are afflicted as well. Will God be there for them? Do they have any hope? Does God Care?

Now today's passage is often read the first week in Advent. Since the stores already have their Christmas decorations up, we are going to do a little advent teaching for today as well.

We read in Isaiah 9:3

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness-a light has shined"

Picture of a Light bulb

We are going to talk a bit this morning about light. There are two standard responses to the following joke. This joke is older than the hills, so if you laugh, it tells me how old you are. So how many Lutherans does it take to change a light bulb. 10. One to change it and 9 to talk about the old one. The second standard joke, is how many Lutherans does it take to change a light bulb? Someone responds with, Change?

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness-a light has shined"

Judah is under a period of great uncertainty. A shadow called Assyria is lurking at their borders. As this point they are now a vassal state of Assyria. They are somewhat free for the moment, but face an unknown future. The Promised Land is at stake.

? So while we have certain tragic national events like Pearl Harbor and 911, most of the time America has it pretty good. For us, our darkness is more personal. We lose a loved one. A marriage ends. We are laid off. We get bad report from the doctor. Depression and fear takes hold. We need some grace some good news in the face of a darkened world. So part of the Advent message, is God is coming! There is hope for the world.

Last week during our Bible study and interesting question was asked. How do we, or better yet, do we see the light of God when it is light out? We search for the light of God when life is dark. But can see the light of God when life is going well.

Consider this

, seeing God's presence, God's light when life is good, builds capacity in our personal batteries when it gets dark.

Thus when we encounter God when life is good, it creates in us hope and confidence when life gets bad. To illustrate this I have a story to tell.

Picture of Car in Traffic

When Jan and I got married we settled into Oconomowoc, Wisconsin. She was a college professor in Waukesha at Carroll College and I had a church in Cottage Grove, Wisconsin outside of Madison. The upshot of it, is that I had an hour commute. I did a lot of driving.

It was one of those very long weeks at church. I had night meeting after night meeting and I was bushed. I was leaving in the dark and returning home in the dark. I was tired, worn out and a bit cranky. So it was Thursday and I got call that my meeting was cancelled. I was never so excited to hear about a cancelled meeting. I jumped in the car and headed home. I thought, I can get home when it's light. I can see Jan and we can have dinner together. Tomorrow is my day off. I can sleep until noon.

So I am driving on the freeway and I knew there was road construction. I could take an exit which would make the commute 20 minutes longer, or trust that the freeway was clear. I, the optimist that I am, trusted the freeway. I went by the exit ramp, and over the top of the overpass and ran into this:

Traffic Jam

It was packed. Nothing was moving. I was very mad at myself. Why didn't I take that exit? I am an idiot. So I sat in my car fuming. Now we started to move at about 1 mile per hour. We were creeping along. All of us had the windows down and this guy sticks his head out the side window and says,

" Hey, buddy, looks like you have a flat tire.: Now I am really fuming. I pull off the side of the road. Sure enough, a front tire is flat.

Picture of a car with flat tire

I had never changed the tire on this vehicle. Where is the jack, and where do you put it. So there I was, sitting in the front seat, reading through the owner's manual. It was getting dark. I was one sad puppy. Suddenly, this guy yells out, do you need any help? He pulls over, and a passenger gets out and he is talking to me with an Eastern European accent. I could barely understand him. He says to me, I have a bad arm, I can't lift much but I can tell you what to do. So he directed, I changed the tire. Along the way we begin to talk. I expressed my thanks and then I told him I was also a pastor. We are done with the tire change it was now dark. He yells out to his friend, that man is a pastor and he promised to pray for me. I hadn't but that didn't matter. I got back into the car and looked up and this is what I saw.

Picture of a Harvest Moon

Suddenly all my gloom and doom went away. This strange angel had come into the middle of my darkness. I rejoiced at the marvels of God. I still got home in the dark, but that no longer mattered. I was filled with joy!

God's presence and light is all around us. We can see it in creation, the chirps of songbirds and the wonder of new buds on Prickly Pear. We can see it in the smiles and joy of children. We can sense it with a warm hug and a kind word. We can grasp it during a quiet time of prayer with our Lord. We can ponder words in scripture and quote a psalm. We can sing songs of praise. A favorite hymn uplifts our soul. Bread and wine leaves us refreshed and renewed. We can marvel at God's amazing grace. We can celebrate miracles big and small. God's light is all around us. How do I know that?

"All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it"