

Bearers of God's Light
Isaiah 49:1-7
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
January 15, 2023
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It was Advent of 2021. The previous year, in 2020, we had not yet begun to again worship in person. That year, we gathered on Zoom. We worshiped via YouTube. You might remember that on Christmas Eve of 2020 many of you sent in pictures of you and members of your household holding candles. On the screen, as we sang "Silent Night" that year, those pictures showed - we saw each other, in our homes, with whatever candles we could gather, holding the light. But, when 2021 came around, in addition to online worship, we also had the opportunity to worship together in person, to gather in the sanctuary.

As Advent began that year and we were looking ahead toward Christmas Eve, we realized we needed to figure something out about candles. In the midst of a continuing pandemic, a virus spread through aerosols in the air, it didn't seem like we were ready to light wax candles and end worship by blowing toward each other as we extinguished them. So, what were we to do?

Well, thanks to clergy conversations and Google, we discovered candle shaped glow sticks. Quickly Kara placed an order for many dozens. And I remember the day they arrived. We tore open the box, pulled one out, cracked the candle to activate the chemicals and watched. We saw it change...a little...though you know how it works, the light of a candle is far more powerful in the dark.

I remember rushing from the office area to the restroom - after all, it's one of few places here on the upper level at church without windows. As soon as the door shut, I was amazed - this glow stick whose light seemed weak while I was standing in the office, was shining brightly in ways I never imagined it could.

A little light goes a long way.

And sometimes we need a little light. Not only us, but this has been true for people throughout history.

The prophet spoke to a people who were living in the shadows of destruction, in the reality that all of their realities had just shifted.

While it was many years since the Northern Kingdom of Israel had fallen, it seems the Southern Kingdom was not going to escape a similar fate. Rather, the Babylonians had taken over, they had destroyed the temple, they had seized Jerusalem, and they had sent the people - at least the leaders, the wealthy, the politicians, the powerful - into exile.

So the people were left wondering. Who were they when they weren't in their land? Where was God? Was God in this foreign place with them? Could they worship in a place that was not their own among people who were not like them?

Everything for them was turned upside down. All the answers became questions. All the certainty turned into apprehension.

And yet, a voice came to them proclaiming that they were not forgotten, that they were not left in a place of shadows, but that they would not only see but *be* the light.

This passage Sally read for us today is one of four servant songs in Second Isaiah. There has been much speculation over the years about the identity of the servant, the one who would lead the people, who would shine God's light. Some look back to the situation in which the people found themselves and understand the servant to be a prophet, some understand the servant to be the newly crowned king who was left trying to figure things out in exile. Some understand this servant to be the anticipated Messiah, others understand this to be a calling for the whole people of Israel. Christians have read backwards through the lens of Jesus, the one Christianity understands as Messiah, and have seen Jesus in this role.

But today, rather than digging deep into the question of who the servant *was*, I want us to consider that maybe we continue to be called to be the servant, maybe we continue to be called to be the ones who carry the light of God into the world. Maybe we - no matter how unlikely that feels - are the ones who are gifted and called to bring the light of God's love and wholeness to the ends of the earth, to all peoples.

Because, as Professor Amy Oden writes, "From Rahab to David to Mary, the story of God's people is full of unlikely servants raised up by God... God gathers God's people into God's life for one purpose: the salvation of the world." ([Commentary on Isaiah 49:1-7 - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary](#)).

So, if we are God's people, then aren't we, too, those who have been made to bring the light to *all* people, to bring the salvation of God to the ends of the earth?

"But that's too much for me," you might say. "I'm good with trying to get to church once a week, but bringing and being a light to *all* people? That's a tall order."

Yes! It is. And if you paid attention to the words of our scripture, you know we aren't the first to feel that. Verse 4 read, "I replied, "But my work seems so useless! I have spent my strength for nothing and to no purpose" (Isaiah 49:4, NLT).

The call of being those who bear God's light *is* overwhelming. It *can* feel like too much. *And* it is our call.

We say this each week at the communion table. When we eat the bread, we say that we offer our bodies to the work of Jesus in this world, Jesus who offered his life to the work of shining God's light, of bringing God's wholeness to everyone. And so we

commit time and time again to keep on keeping on...to live in Jesus' ways and to do the work of bringing about God's kin-dom.

And if it feels like too much, you are in good company. We only need to look as far as the prophets, though we can look much further, to find that those who are called by God generally don't feel like enough. And maybe that's the point. Remember, God keeps on using people who can't do it on their own, people who are too young or too weak, people who are outsiders or unexpected, in order that it becomes clear that God is in the mix, that it isn't the work of individuals, but the work that we are doing together with God.

So, bearers of God's light - yes, that is who you are. Bearers of God's light, how will you shine into places of despair and hopelessness today? How will you help people who are lost to possibility see the prospect of something more? How will you be a light not only for those who are like you, not only for those within your circles, but a light that shines beyond those comfortable places and for the "restoration of all creation" ([Commentary on Isaiah 49:1-7 - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary](#)).

Let's remember what we've been talking about lately...the work of God requires us to be open to change, not just to external change but to allowing ourselves to be changed by God's presence. And the work of God asks us to be courageous...courageous enough to do that which we cannot do alone, courageous enough to do for those who are not our own, courageous enough to live from a place of love, deep and true love, for all people.

Again, remember those candle glow sticks...their light may not be enough to light a stadium, but their light is enough to make an impact. And so, we won't do everything in one day. But we can, as God's servants, gifted and called for the good of all creation, make a difference, little by little, one moment and one action at a time.

Friends, you are called to be bearers of God's light to this world. May it be so.