

Be the Light
Isaiah 60:1-5a
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
December 28, 2025
Rev. Jill Cameron Michel

My family was recently at a musical performance in a large venue. We had just arrived at our seats and others were still coming in when the performance began and the lights went down. There were two women near us making their way to their seats, both of whom were struggling. Not only were there about four steps with no handrail, but with the bright lights having just gone off and no lights directly on the steps, the darkness was overwhelming. We found ourselves worrying that someone would fall.

Light makes a difference.

But what does that mean? Because sometimes we are so afraid of the dark that we simply shine blinding spotlights into it, in an effort to find something that seems more comfortable.

And yet, as we acknowledged just a week ago at our Longest Night service, any of us who have experienced sadness or loneliness, grief or depression, know that the answer is not to scare away the darkness or to try to run away from it, but rather to thoughtfully and intentionally let even the gentlest of light shine within it.

The answer isn't to flip on artificial light or its often corresponding toxic positivity, but rather to find ways to reflect the light of God's love and presence into that which is overwhelming.

Barbara Brown Taylor, in her book *Learning to Walk in the Dark* tells about an essay by James Bremner as he reflected on his childhood fear of the dark. She writes this about Bremner's experience, "There was no reason for him to be afraid, he says now. He lived in a small village in western Scotland where there were no wild animals or known criminals. But there were also no streetlights or porch lights in his village, which meant that once night fell, the darkness was absolute. Every evening after supper, it was his job to take the family's empty milk bottles down to the bottom of the driveway so the milkman could swap them out next morning - a chore that put a major dent in his personal history of darkness. The driveway was only about a hundred yards long, but from the house it disappeared into complete blackness almost at once. When James finally balled up the courage to walk into it - running was not an option with glass bottles in his arms - he lived for the moment when he could set them down and race back to the house. The darkness never stopped terrifying him. Every single night it took all the courage he had.

She goes on writing, "But while his fear of the dark may have been baseless, the bravery it drew out of him stayed with him for the rest of his life. 'Courage,' he writes now, 'which is no more than the management of fear, must be practiced. For this,

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children [and dare I say adults] need a widespread, easily obtained, cheap, renewable source of something scary but not actually dangerous.’ Darkness, he says, fits that bill” (Barbara Brown Taylor, *Learning to Walk in the Dark*, 36-37).

There are many ways that we can be the light.

- Sometimes it looks like love.
- Sometimes it looks like courage.
- Sometimes it looks like a listening ear.
- Sometimes it looks like being God’s people in the midst of a hurting world.

Scripture is filled with images of the divine light...of God’s light...of Jesus as light to the world. *But* it is also filled with images of us, ordinary people, as a source of light for others.

Our reading today reflects both of these. It opens with words that celebrate God’s presence and light entering the darkness. But it doesn’t leave it there.

While this passage from Third Isaiah, a passage speaking to people after the Babylonian exile, begins with God’s light shining hope into their world, it also talks about the ability of the people to be the light. “Nations shall come to your light,” (Isaiah 60:3) we hear the prophet say. “Then you shall see and be radiant,” (Isaiah 60:5) Isaiah of the exile proclaims.

What would it be like for us to be radiant?

What light might we shine into the world that would draw people into its hope, its warmth, its possibility?

In her December 19th post titled “In The Middle of the Light,” Cameron Tremble told this story, “A woman lives in an apartment building where the power goes out often. It drops just enough to interrupt dinner, silence the hum of appliances, unsettle sleep. After the first few times, she stops being surprised. She keeps candles in a drawer and matches by the stove.

“One night, the power goes out again. She lights a candle and sets it on the windowsill. Across the courtyard, she notices another light appear. Then another. They aren’t coordinated. No one planned this. It’s just neighbors doing what people do when the dark comes and there’s no guarantee it will pass quickly.

“No one pretends the outage isn’t real. No one insists the candles are enough to fix it. But the building looks different now—less isolated. Less afraid” (“In The Middle of the Light” by Rev. Cameron Tremble at *Piloting Faith*, December 19, 2025, <https://www.pilotingfaith.org/p/in-the-middle-of-the-light>).

Friends, our job is not to fix everything. Nor is our job to ignore the struggles and pretend they are not there.

But what we can do is to shine a little light. We can muster up the courage to step into the darkness of grief with the light of silent presence. We can muster up the courage to step into the darkness of injustice with the light of mercy and equity. We can muster up the courage to step into the darkness of overwhelm with the light of friendship. We can muster up the courage to step into the darkness with the light of God's love.

As I remind us every year, Christmas is not over. While we celebrate the birth of Jesus on Christmas Eve, the reminder that in Jesus light came into the world, the work of Christmas has only just begun.

We see the light...we celebrate the light...but the work of Christmas is for us to be the light that in the midst of the very real darkness of this life others might know they are not alone. Amen.