

**Isaiah 60:1-6**  
**October 20, 2024**  
**60th Birthday**  
**Rev. Kelley Becker**

**Scripture: Isaiah 60: 1-6**

This morning's text should be read as the beginning of a piece of poetry that presents a powerful vision of hope for all people.

This is Isaiah 60: 1-6.

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

<sup>2</sup>For darkness shall cover the earth  
and thick darkness the peoples,  
but the Lord will arise upon you,  
and his glory will appear over you.

<sup>3</sup>Nations shall come to your light  
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

<sup>4</sup>Lift up your eyes and look around;  
they all gather together; they come to you;  
your sons shall come from far away,  
and your daughters shall be carried in their nurses' arms.

<sup>5</sup>Then you shall see and be radiant;  
your heart shall thrill and rejoice,<sup>[a]</sup>  
because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you;  
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.

<sup>6</sup>A multitude of camels shall cover you,  
the young camels of Midian and Ephah;  
all those from Sheba shall come.

They shall bring gold and frankincense  
and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord. (NRSV)

October is the best month, you know. Fall is finally making itself known; the leaves are changing, pumpkin spice is abundant, and of course, playful fright is in the air. There are skeletons, witches on brooms, and vampires around every corner. There are ghost stories and horror movies and so many things that go "bump in the night." And for some of us, that's great fun. For others, though, it's just plain scary. One thing I've noticed about scariness is that it is very often associated with the dark. Dracula comes out at night as do scary men with chainsaws and hockey masks.

I have a friend who is always trying to trick me into watching a scary movie. He will say things like, "You should watch Rosemary's Baby, it's a great family film." Only it's not and I know it would have me wide awake all night long. I joke (sort of) that real life is scary enough, I don't need to be scared while watching TV, afraid of whatever is going bump in the night. How many of you were scared of the dark as children? How

many of you are still scared of the dark? There are wonderful things that happen in the darkness...we can see the Northern Lights and comets streaking across the sky. Seeds germinate in the darkness of underground and embryos grow in the darkness of the womb. Experts say we sleep better when the room is dark.

But generally, in literature, darkness is not a good thing. In the Bible, darkness symbolizes sin, ignorance, death, and separation from God. Rev. Hubbard read the beginning of chapter 60 of Isaiah for us this morning. That passage would have had a lot more umph to it if I had asked her to also read chapters 58 and 59. Those chapters are characterized by gloom and doom, despair, and a call for the people to turn from their wicked ways. There is a longing for light; the author writes, "We wait for the light but there is only darkness."

Into this darkness, like the first fireworks in the sky on Independence Day, along comes chapter 60 with, "Arise, shine, for your light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you." This abrupt shift from doom and gloom to light and glory is so abrupt it is startling. This light would have been very good news for the Babylonian exiles in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE who had returned to Jerusalem. Upon their return, they saw their beloved home in ruins, riddled with the wreckage of war and marked by the scars of empire. Living conditions were abysmal. And the happy reunion between the returning exiles and their faith siblings who had remained in Jerusalem was not so happy. They were divided...this time, not by an outside threat or enemy, but among themselves. They needed some light in their darkness.

In the exilic and post-exilic contexts the "glory of the Lord" verse 1 refers to was understood to be the presence of the Lord, which guided the children of Israel through the wilderness. The glory of the Lord appeared, promising manna, when the Israelites complained in the desert about a lack of food. God didn't promise to be present when/if they got it together, rather the Holy came in all the Holy's glory, into the mess, into the heartache and fear, into the darkness, and straight into the hearts of the people.

You see, glory is not something God possesses, God is glory. Here in Isaiah 60, God's presence is Light. Light arises among them and does what God does...offers life and hope...not just for the returning exiles, not just for the remnant who stayed in Jerusalem, but "all the nations." The life and hope God offers was and is good news for absolutely everyone.

This good news was proclaimed at the very first worship service of this congregation on January 5, 1964. Isaiah 6:1-9 was read and Rev. Andy Messenger preached a sermon titled, "We Have This Ministry." Dear ones, here we are 60 years later celebrating that "We (Still) Have This Ministry." Admittedly, our shared ministry doesn't look just like it did in 1964. Your bulletins weren't reproduced on a mimeograph machine. Our offices and worship space are all at the same address now.

Your ministers are women. And we don't take turns cleaning the church or mowing the grass these days.

Beyond this building, from technology and social media to gun violence and climate change, life in 2024 isn't the same as life in 1964. Even the makeup of families is different...in some beautiful ways. Not everything has changed though, just as Rev. Messenger looked out at the faces of a congregation committed to reflecting God's light to each other and their neighbors near and far, I do too...the faces are just different. The Light is still very much the same because it is the light of unconditional love. Love is always good news, in all times and places.

This is the kind of love that never quits, never goes away, and never gives up on you or anyone else. It is the kind of love that partners with Habitat for Humanity to build houses for families. It is the kind of love that mulches, weeds, and harvests food in the Community Garden. It is the kind of love that partners with other churches to support Concern. It is the kind of love that sees the challenges of growing older and supports the work of Eldercare. It is the kind of love that says yes to neighbors when they call for help with utilities or prescriptions. It is the kind of love that walks to end hunger in the Crop Walk and collects coins for a community car repair fund.

It is the kind of love that keeps our covenant with the Regional and General Church and collects school supplies for Pack the Backpack. It is the kind of love that values the contributions of children and makes space for them in worship, even when they get a little noisy. It is the kind of love that welcomes and holds the door wide open for the ones who have been excluded and the ones who have been hurt, even and maybe especially the ones who have been hurt by churches. And it is the kind of love that actively, always looks for ways to share itself with the world.

This Light according to the poet, has a way of calling people together. In verses 3-6, a picture is painted of a Light so bright it draws people to it. And when it does, everything changes. There is a great reversal. The ones who have been oppressed will have power; the ones who had their resources taken from them will experience abundance, and there will be joy where there has only been misery. I think it is the author's way of saying, "We are better together." This vision was written down centuries ago. These were big dreams.

Some thought the birth of Jesus would turn the world upside down and finally the ways of Love and Light would be the ways of the world. But we know "We Still Have This Ministry" because there is still work for us to do. We began the service by reading this morning's headlines. There is still work for us to do. And at times it seems like there is so much to do that we don't know where to start or if we are making a difference at all.

Here is what I know about DCC...wherever we go, the Light of Love is there. The glory of the Lord is within you and it shines so brightly. I heard a folktale a long time ago that came to mind this week as I was thinking about your bright light. There was once a dark cave, deep down in the ground, underneath the earth and hidden away from view. Because it was so deep in the earth, the light had never been there. The cave had never seen light. The word 'light' meant nothing to the cave, who couldn't imagine what 'light' might be.

Then one day, the sun sent an invitation to the cave, inviting it to come up and visit. When the cave came up to visit the sun it was amazed and delighted, because the cave had never seen light before, and it was dazzled by the wonder of the experience. Feeling so grateful to the sun for inviting it to visit, the cave wanted to return the kindness, and so it invited the sun to come down to visit it sometime, because the sun had never seen darkness.

So the day came, and the sun entered the cave, it looked around with great interest, wondering what 'darkness' would be like. Then it became puzzled, and asked the cave, 'Where is the darkness?'

There is nowhere the Light of Love cannot reach. This congregation has lived that for 60 years and I could not be prouder. Yes, there is more to do, but Bartlesville is better because DCC is here, the world is better because DCC exists, our lives are richer because of this community. We are truly better together and life is a whole lot less scary.

Happy birthday DCC, you are loved...more than you know.

Amen.