

## *A Revelation or a Revolution?*

Isaiah 60:1-6

Sermon by Joanne Gallardo

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Grace, peace, and mercy are yours through our triune God, amen.

### ***A message from the prophet Isaiah, chapter 60, verses 1-6.***

*Arise, shine, for your light has come,  
and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.  
See, darkness covers the earth  
and thick darkness is over the peoples,  
but the Lord rises upon you  
and his glory appears over you.  
Nations will come to your light,  
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.  
“Lift up your eyes and look about you:  
All assemble and come to you;  
your sons come from afar,  
and your daughters are carried on the hip.  
Then you will look and be radiant,  
your heart will throb and swell with joy;  
the wealth on the seas will be brought to you,  
to you the riches of the nations will come.  
Herds of camels will cover your land,  
young camels of Midian and Ephah.  
And all from Sheba will come,  
bearing gold and incense  
and proclaiming the praise of the Lord.*

And skipping to verse 10

*“Foreigners will rebuild your walls,  
and their kings will serve you.  
Though in anger I struck you,  
in favor I will show you compassion.  
Your gates will always stand open,  
they will never be shut, day or night,  
so that people may bring you the wealth of the nations—  
their kings led in triumphal procession.  
For the nation or kingdom that will not serve you will perish;  
it will be utterly ruined.  
“The glory of Lebanon will come to you,  
the juniper, the fir and the cypress together,  
to adorn my sanctuary;*

*and I will glorify the place for my feet.  
The children of your oppressors will come bowing before you;  
all who despise you will bow down at your feet  
and will call you the City of the Lord,  
Zion of the Holy One of Israel.  
“Although you have been forsaken and hated,  
with no one traveling through,  
I will make you the everlasting pride  
and the joy of all generations.*

Our memory verse for this month is Isaiah 60:1 “Arise, shine, for your light is come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.” I invite you to take this verse and make it formative. Put it where you can see it and remember it, say it daily, and keep reminding yourself that in this season of January we find ourselves in, as dark and cold as it may be, our light has come.

You cannot know light unless you first know darkness. You cannot know revolution unless you first know darkness.

I don't mean this to be a depressing sermon, it will certainly not focus on darkness, but unless you face it, dwell in it, sit with it you cannot know and appreciate the light. Light is so much brighter when you've experienced, as Isaiah says, “thick darkness over the peoples.” For me, I often think of times when I've been sleeping in a very dark room, and come out to a bright sunlit room. It hurts at first. It takes your eyes time to adjust, but when your eyes do adjust, everything is so much more clear. The darkness had its place, but so does the light. So does the radiance, which is what we are “on the road” to this Sunday.

I've always felt confused about Epiphany. The holidays, for the most part, are over, but then there's this side celebration like a wedding with a really good after party. Is it joyous? Of course. But is it that simple? No, it is not.

As Isaiah 60 states, and as I stated before, a darkness covered the earth and darkness, all the people. We know a little bit about darkness by now. Part of Advent is considered waiting in darkness. You might have attended our longest night service where we sat in the darkness, and rain, for quite a bit of time. The magi walked in darkness, unsure of where they might end up, because as we know, darkness is all-encompassing and confusing.

I can imagine Magi wandering, wandering, and wandering. You're probably tired, thirsty, hungry...you don't want to look for the light because if you don't see it you don't want to disappoint yourself and psych yourself out of the journey. You know it's there, you just don't know where it is. Sometimes you've just gotta put one

foot in front of the other, because looking up all the time is hard. You can also run into things, bump into things, or fall over yourselves. Wondering looking upward is just not practical.

This is considered living in the present. One might say it's the "here but not yet" journey Christians are on as we work in the present to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God and yet live for the day when God's dream comes to fruition. In reference to Pastor Dan's last sermon, the weight of saving the world is not on our shoulders, it's on God's. God is working God's purpose out, as the hymn says. And also, we take one step at a time, doing the next right thing, whether in darkness or in light, remembering our goal but also not forgetting to live in the present.

But as someone who attempted to help a lot of clients get through life as mentally sound as possible, focusing on the future, focusing on the light, is also essential not only in your own mental well being, but also your Christian formation.

Many of us are looking to 2021 as a reset button. 2020 may have been our worst year yet. We spent most of it apart, we lived in some fear, and things happened that were beyond our control. But in a bit of a reality check, we can't put all our eggs in the basket of hope that says all things will go back to normal right now. Sure, that's the long view. But in the here and now, we have what we have, and we make that walk toward hope in a wise and careful way.

Our future is bright. Your eyes may feel funny and take some time to adjust, but radiance will come. And as I said, living one step at a time is great. But what can also be helpful, especially if we are overwhelmed, is to think, will this matter to me in a year? Of course 2020 will have lasting effects on all of us for some time to come, but for the smaller things that get stuck in your mind like a burr or a piece of chewing gum, doesn't the promise of God creating a new thing outweigh the present reality? You've done really hard things, you can do the next really hard thing. If 2021 brings hard things, you can do this next hard thing.

I ask in the sermon title, "Revelation or Revolution?" You may be wondering about this revolution part. An epiphany is a sort of revelation. That's what I talked about in the first part of this sermon. How to handle a revelation when you've been in darkness for a long time. Another aspect of this Isaiah passage is, isn't what we want a revolution? Isn't what follows a revelation a revolution?

One thing I like about this scripture when I think about the past year is the passage that says, "Your sons will come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the hip." So many of us have been away for so long that we miss seeing our dearest ones. Isaiah is talking, of course, of people coming out of

exile. While many of us don't understand true exile, and a comparison here might feel cheap or pithy, we understand a tiny, tiny bit of what exile might feel like given that so many of us have been apart for what is now going on a year.

If you take a closer look at this scripture, and I encourage you to do that either now or on your own this week, this is sort of a revenge fantasy text. That might be difficult for us to think of as coming from the Bible. But if you look at the Bible as a whole, this isn't new. Some of the more intense Psalms talk about bashing babies heads against rocks, God smiting the unjust, vanquishing our enemies with God at our side. That's the part of the Bible that we choose, or at least I choose, not to think about all the time.

But it's there. And if we're honest with ourselves, don't we feel those things sometimes? Maybe not something quite so violent as that, but we have enemies sometimes. We feel sometimes that people are out to get us. It can feel that the world has conspired against us. We can feel alone, and disconnected, and maybe we lash out at people we don't intend to. I think this is a common, universal feeling. Not a great coping strategy or way to live your life, but a true, honest feeling nonetheless. What's so great about the Bible is that the authors don't shy away from that. They get it. They get us, all these thousands of years later, and that's the great thing about Biblical literature.

Regardless, as I said, this passage is a little revenge-y. But also note, this work is dialogical. And by that I mean that nothing written or spoken exists in a vacuum. We are meant to have a conversation with the text. I hope what I say isn't controversial, but the Bible is a living breathing piece of literature that is full of truth. Its contents are open to interpretation, like any piece of written work, and not everything is instruction. Just because it's truth doesn't mean everything is a how-to. This is not a manual, we have free will. When I think of instruction, I think of Jesus, but again, the prophets were meant to shake us up and not necessarily give us a guide for how to deal with our enemies. The prophets had a lot of feelings, and as we all know, feelings don't always reflect the logical or permanent part of ourselves. They are ever-changing. To think of it as literal is to ignore the richness and fullness of the text.

One needs to move beyond this nice, clean cut lectionary reading and look at the entire periscope. Revelation is at hand. We are enlightened. But a revolution? A changing of how things are? Not so much. We often think of things such as the upside down kingdom, we sing "My soul cries out" and how it's turning the world around. This Isaiah text is the epitome of that, but is it the epitome of how Jesus would have us move about in our world? My thought is, not so much. This text in Isaiah has things flipped around, literally. The oppressed are lifted up, but also having the opportunity to become the oppressor. Empire is now at the hands of

the oppressed, and like any human being would think, now it's my turn. Many folks say to "eat the rich" and "abolish the police" and that makes so much sense. But when we say those words, what do we really mean? We're speaking out of frustration with wealth inequality (sometimes while ignoring the wealth that we indeed have), we're speaking out of fear, disgust, and horror at police shooting innocent people, disproportionately people of color. We're writing our own revenge text. But do we want to hurt those who have hurt us, or is there another way?

As Christians, along with our wanting to smash down the things that don't work for us, what else would we do? Simply flip things around? There's a song called "Si el norte fuera el sur" by Ricardo Arjona that talks about, as the title translates, "If the north were the south." The song goes on to say that in Guatemala there would be a Disneyland, the "in fashion" look would be darker skinned and short, and someone like Fidel Castro would be a worker on Wall St. He then says, "Seriamos igual o tal vez un poco peor" which means, things would be the same, maybe a bit worse. The point of the song being to 1) abolish borders and 2) simply flipping things around isn't a revolution.

A revolution happens when we see that light that I referenced earlier in this sermon. Not a revenge program born of darkness, wanting others to experience the darkness we have. A revolution is using police spending to include mental health services, mentorship programs, after school alternatives, help for single parents, assistance for those getting out of abusive situations. Peacekeepers who use words and resources instead of guns and scare tactics. A revolution is redistributing wealth in such a way that a handful of people don't have all the resources and all the access. Maybe they might actually pay taxes with no loopholes that afford them even more money than they had before. A system where taxes could fund schools, entitlements (and I say entitlements because, as the name states, folks are entitled to them), and food banks. A revolution is ending the housing crisis with affordable, safe housing. That sort of turn around, not flipping things upside down, brings true change. That is a revolution born of a revelation, of having walked in darkness and seen a great light.

What's causing a revolution here in our midst? Because we needn't reinvent the wheel entirely. Places like Center for Healing and Hope, offering COVID testing to folks, especially folks without health insurance. Offering medical assistance without asking for your credit card number first. Goshen Eats providing food without asking, "Now, do you really need this? Let me see some ID." Our agencies that do good around the world with no strings attached. Protesting racial injustice even though you may have never experienced racial injustice yourself and you're doing what you're doing because your siblings are hurting. Lending money to friends in need, knowing they might pay you back, might not,

but you can handle it because you have been given plenty. And if they do pay you back, not charging interest because that's usury and has been clearly deemed a sin in the Bible. Asking for consent, and I'm not just talking about sexual relations, asking before doing something affects another person. Not just doing it because you're "pretty sure they're ok with it," but asking first. Volunteering time? Time you could have spent doing a million other things for yourself but you're choosing to help other people? That's a revolution.

There are myriad things I could mention concerning what's causing a revolution in our midst. We're not there yet, but we're on the way. And there's plenty of room for you to take part. In fact, you're invited to take part.

As I said before, before that even occurs, you must first know darkness. Maybe you know darkness personally, maybe you see the world and it's not as you would have it and it feels dark every time you open your news app, or turn on the TV, or look at your local paper. Your eyes need to be open to the darkness around us. It's not pleasant, but it's necessary. It's darkness not unlike the permacloud that covers Northern Indiana each fall and winter. There are moments of light. And we need to have that hope for spring and summer, where light is much more common. A brighter day is coming if we are patient and work towards the things that make things just. This is done by trusting in God, and as I've quoted Alan Kreider before in a sermon, asking God, "What are you doing, and how can I help?"

And as for that personal darkness, the time that comes before the dawn of radiance and revelation. That wandering we all do, looking for our star, getting tired, frustrated, and lost. Looking over the past year and seeing ruined plans and disconnects, disruptions of life and people lost. It's difficult to imagine light. For some of us, it does not compute.

For those folks I say, keep walking. Like the magi, keep walking. The proverbial journey of a thousand miles begins with one step. It begins with putting one foot in front of the other. It happens looking for mile markers. Those markers could be a spouse, a friend, a gift from God you didn't see coming, moments of connection, a card from someone dear. Yes, these are little things, but they are glimpses of radiance. And eventually, the star will show itself. The hard thing you have lived through will be behind you, and while there is uncertainty of what lies ahead, there will always be a star shining bright.

And for those who are mission minded, focused on the world around us, wanting revelation to come in the form of a revolution. Keep walking. The urge to run and push is great, but keep walking, one foot in front of the other, doing the next right

thing. The salvation of the world is ultimately God's, and it's not all on our shoulders. But there's work to do. Find that work. Look for the star.

May God's grace, peace and mercy be your guiding star this year, forming you and shaping you into the radiant being God has intended you to be. Amen.