

Isaiah 9:2-3, 6-7 (NRSV)

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness--on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forward, onward and forever more. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

The Promise of Hope

We have had beautiful weather until recently. The church has been so cold in my office some days that I could use one of the old fireplaces wide enough and deep enough to roast an ox. You know, the kind of old stone fireplaces with stone benches inside at each end of the hearth. Inside by the fire was the warmest place in the house. This spot was reserved for those ill and aged in the days before central heating. These were seats of hope as well as light in a dark world.

In the same way, Christ's light in the midst of darkness is promised us by Isaiah. In a very dark time, when the Israelites lived in captivity in Babylon in the darkness of exile, Isaiah promises one from David's house will come to save them and us. He will be our light in darkness, the light which John says no darkness can ever put out. This "He" is Jesus Christ. Then and now, Jesus is our hope.

For even as God's people, we may sometimes feel beaten down by life. We may be tempted to lose hope. For with hope, there is the possibility of failure. Sometimes it might seem easier not to dream or to risk, playing it safe instead. For though we long for hope, we may not know what it looks like or where to begin. Maybe that is why seeing Jesus as light in darkness is so powerful. For in most stories and tales, light is associated with help and hope. Light in dark times reveals a way, where in the dark there was no path.

Now Paul defines hope for us in Romans 8:24-25, saying “For in hope we are saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience (p. 2127 The Harper Collins Study Bible NRSV).”

And it seems to me that our forefathers’ and foremothers’ hope in God bore fruits we still enjoy. Through their courage and perseverance God led them through extremes in weather, war and economy to move Westminster Presbyterian Church to this new location in 1929. They built this building as a community church for all peoples just before the depression, I believe, as a sign of hope. They left us a legacy of risk-taking and courageous action so we might thrive in today’s difficult times. They boldly claimed their destiny as children of God and trusted Jesus as their hope.

For Jesus gives us the courage to be ourselves. He gives us the courage to live out our gifts in this time and place, whatever “darkness” comes. By trusting Him over our own abilities, we find the courage to be ourselves.

Now this courage to be, Paul Tillich explains, means “One can become confident in one’s existence only after ceasing to base one’s confidence on oneself. On the other hand, the courage of confidence is in no way based on anything finite besides oneself, not even the Church. It is based on God and solely on God, who is experienced in a unique and personal encounter. (The Courage to Be”, p. 163)... One could say that the courage to be is the courage to accept oneself as accepted in spite of being unacceptable. . . Accepting acceptance though being unacceptable is the basis for the courage of confidence (Ibid., 164-165)...The acceptance by God, his forgiving or justifying act, is the only and ultimate source of a courage to be which is able to take away the anxiety of guilt and condemnation into itself. For the ultimate power of self-affirmation can only be the power of being-itself (Ibid., p. 166)...the courage to be is the key to being-itself (Ibid., p. 181).”

This courage to be is what our founders discovered through prayer and prayerful-action. Their belief in God helped them choose hope, even when it looked financially like we might go under in the 1930’s. And their bills were paid as the fruits of their hope. Just as we find ourselves \$22,000 short in pledges at the end of October. We too trust God will help all - who are able - to complete their 2015 pledge and to give generously in 2016 so we might continue to be a beacon of hope here and now. And we thank you, for whatever you are able to give. Each gift is important. Each gift is a symbol of hope in God’s future for us here as God’s people.

By claiming our legacy of courage and trust in God, we will discover how much God will make possible here and now. Standing firmly on the ground of God's love, we continue to prayerfully choose hope like those here before us, knowing God is with us, making us enough, just as we are.

Let us pray. Merciful and loving God, we pray today that You help us to find our hope in You. Give us the courage to be the people You made us to be, in Christ's name. Amen.