

Emmaus Road Sermon
November 28, 2010
Anita Rediger

Teach His Ways, Walk His Paths

It is evening. Outdoors it even looks like night! Our holiday weekend draws to a close. Tonight we may feel tired. On this first Sunday in Advent, we've gathered around reverent Advent hymns and shared in centering words. How good it feels to quiet ourselves in this place of worship...

Throughout tonight's liturgy we've heard words describing the ups and downs of our lives. At the lightening of the Advent wreath we spoke these words: (Repeat the responsive reading)

Leader: We wait for light and lo! there is darkness;
We long for brightness, but we walk in gloom

All: As we prepare to greet the Light, let our blinded eyes be opened, for Christ is the Light to them that sit in darkness.

The last verse of the Isaiah reading shared by David & Tanya: "O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!" And the words just read for us by Phyllis – words filled with imagery of darkness and light; daytime and nighttime.

Like all other weeks, this has been a week with of sunlight and shadows – meteorologically as well as within the scope of our lives. Individually and as a body, we've celebrated happy times and enjoyed the gift of simple pleasures. - as at the same time we are aware of darkness which comes over us - in strained relationships and dreams which seem less and less likely to be fulfilled. We continue to share Linda's shock and distress which continues as a result of the accident in which she was involved last Sunday evening. Soberly, we note the risk every one of us bears as we share the dark country roads with our Amish neighbors. We carry concern for Genevieve as she anticipates surgery on Dec. 9.

At the same time, we delight in new babies and new marriages. Yet, we feel the loneliness that a holiday season accentuates for many of. We recognize Neva & Derryle's exhausting experience in the marathon of Derryle's health concerns. We share the "bittersweetness" of Melissa's important decision to retire from teaching as the semester ends. We are a people who are quickly able to identify with the ancient writers desire for God! A God who comes with Light – a Light that the darkness can never overcome!

At the season of winter draws near, we will become well acquainted with physical darkness. We know for the next few months we must go about in a time of long nights – and cold. *It is a season that beckons to me to sleep – (I wonder about the ancient rhythms among us as humans that must have been part of the earliest peoples' survival strategy.*

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As I think of raccoons and prairie dogs, opossums and skunks going to their winter dens for a season of hibernation, I note a similar urge to “hibernate.!”)

Yet, in the midst of this dark season, our Advent scriptures invite us to wakefulness!

Wakefulness – let’s think about it.

First, it’s one of my favorite feelings. How I hate to “fight sleep!” (I am certainly a person who would benefit from just a brief nap at noontime!) Yet one doesn’t even have to be sleepy to be “zoned out.” Many times, it is when I am not one bit sleepy that I am least alert... that is I may be very awake and at the same time very unaware of my surroundings or the signs around me.

Some of us were reflecting last week on the phenomenon of driving – most often on familiar roads- arriving home, but without a sense of awareness of the trip at all. Melissa noted some of her late night trips home from Maplewood had this flavor to them! Don’t you wonder “where we are” when we later discover our absent-mindedness? Perhaps, this is an indicator gauging the busyness of our minds – - so much activity going on within our heads that we become unaware our present surroundings. We’ve all been on both ends of bouts of “selective hearing!” and last week at SV someone remarked that they thought “selective seeing” is also an affliction among some family members! However, in may be the result of day-in, day-out routine and the deadening weight of spiritual and emotional fatigue which seems to creep – so insidiously – upon us.

It is a call to renewed spiritual awareness that we hear invitation to in Paul’s letter to the Romans. The wakefulness that Paul calls the Roman church from is something other than an afternoon nap, rather Paul calls out to the believers to help one another shed the doldrums of hopelessness, irreverence for the world around them and the numbing effects of cynicism. Was this even possible given the realities of life in the Roman Empire? Is it possible for us – persons of the global community – fraught with disease, destruction, greed and scarcity???

Poets craft word pictures which help us open the eyes of our hearts.

Mysteries, Yes

Truly, we live with mysteries too marvelous
to be understood.

How grass can be nourished in the mouths of lambs.

How rivers and stones are forever in allegiance with gravity
while we ourselves dream of rising.

How two hands touch and the bonds will never be broken,

How people come, from delight or the scars of damage,
to the comfort of a poem.

Let me keep my distance, always, from those
who think they have the answers.

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Let me keep company always with those who say
“Look!” and laugh in astonishment,
and bow their heads.

– Mary Oliver

And so we turn again to the Isaiah text, “The word that Isaiah, son of Amoz saw...

In a time – not much different from our times – in a time of war and rumors of war, the word of the Lord came to Isaiah. Judah - pinched between the alliance of Damascus and Israel is in a very hard place. King Ahaz turns to Isaiah for advice and assurance. In response, Isaiah offers a vision that sees something else, that goes beyond what “meets the eye” that is, beyond the doomsday, either/or thinking is another possibility altogether!

Isaiah responds to Ahaz, “If we will but live out the vision God has for us this is what it will look like...in the days to come... If we will but live out the vision God has for us this: God will be seen as the ultimate authority – all the nations will come to see the wisdom of this. Many people will say – not just a few – come, let us turn our allegiance to God. Let us become God’s students. This trustworthy God will teach us his ways so that we can walk in his paths...”

This is what God’s vision for the whole world looks like – think about it, imagine it in your mind’s eye! God will be the judge over the nations and as a result nations won’t need weapons anymore. They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. If we will but live out the vision God has for us this is what it will look like...in the days to come...

In anticipation of “the days to come,” Isaiah encourages Ahaz and the people, “O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!” That is, so that in the days to come nations will turn to God, let’s begin today ourselves by walking in the light of the Lord!

Paul implores followers some 800 years later, “God’s vision for the nations is continuing to unfold...don’t “space out!” Don’t get so preoccupied with less important things or with down-right destructive things. This is the time to wake up and follow the light that Jesus bears in a world that loves darkness!”

I appreciate Rabbinical-type stories (Jesus a master.) One such story goes like this: the student is fearful that he will miss important spiritual truths. He asks the teacher, “is there anything I can do to be sure that I am able to see with the eyes of my heart?” The old teacher responds, “As little as you can do to make the sun rise in the morning.” The student laments, “Then of what use are the spiritual exercises you prescribe? The wise teacher replies, “These are important to make sure that you are not asleep when the sun begins to rise...”

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In this season of Advent – just like King Ahaz, just like the Roman believers, we are invited to step back from the immediacy of life and take stock of our surroundings. It's not easy to do. We need each others help. By traveling together, worshipping together, studying together... by walking in the light of the old, old story of God's prophetic vision...there is something on the horizon the likes of which we have never seen before...

Spoken by voices throughout the congregation:

*So stay. Sit. Tarry. Ponder. Wait. Behold. Wonder. There will be
time enough for running. For rushing. For worrying. For pushing. For now,
stay....wait. Something is on the horizon.*