

**1-15-17 "This Little Light of Ours" A Reflection on John 1:35-42,
Isaiah 49:1-7 by Mark Arbisi, Christ Church, KBK**

This morning, now well into the holy season of Epiphany we receive a clear and unmistakable gift from the ancient prophet, what might be described as our marching orders: Thus says the Lord, "*I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.*" Wow! And double wow! Just when you thought it was safe to go home it turns out we have a whole word out there to shine light on! Though these words are ancient, pre-Christ, we clearly hear our Christian identity proclaimed in the form of a vocation—we, no less, we are the go-er-out'ers, the light-bringers and the light-bearers, the shatter'ers both of darkness in whatever form you can name it and the confront'ers of nations, any nation at any time or place!

As our Jesus later would famously say, we are the ones who, "*go and do*" as Christ has done unto us we do unto others. That is what being a light looks like. Again, Wow! No matter who we are, pew warmers and/or pulpit-shakers. We are those who confront nations with light—it's quite a task really, an incredible life actually, one that we didn't choose, one that chose us before we were born. And yes, all of which is very much in the manner and the model of the great civil rights leader and pulpit-shaker whom we honor tomorrow, MLK Jr. Remember the voice he heard in the night of his despair, "Stand up for righteousness, stand up for truth. God will be at your side forever." AKA, go, be a light to the nations, all so indeed, as the prophet of old understood so long ago, that salvation may reach everyone. Kinda cool when you think about it. It's implications are profound. We are most clearly not victims of circumstance, not, aimless wanderers or mere busybodies—no, heck no, never us who are Jesus' people. We have a clearly defined mission and very specific purpose to life: to give light to the nations!...nothing less.

Perhaps the greatest living biblical Scholar, Walter Brueggemann (who identifies as UCC BTW) author of some seventy scholarly books would not be one we would naturally associate with poetry, but lo and behold, what follows is a poem he penned, titled simply *Epiphany*:

On Epiphany day,

We are still the people walking.

We are still people in the dark,

and the darkness looms large around us,

beset as we are by fear, anxiety, brutality, violence, loss—a dozen alienations that we cannot manage.

We are—we could be—people of [God's] light.

We pray for the light of [God's] glorious presence

as we wait for [God's] appearing;

we pray for the light of [God's] wondrous grace
as we exhaust our coping capacity;
we pray for [God's] gift of newness that
will override our weariness;
we pray that we may see and know and hear and trust
in [God's] good rule.

That we may have energy, courage, and freedom to enact
[God's] rule through the demands of this day.

We submit our day to [God] and to [God's] rule, with deep joy and high
hope.

And so we submit, as in being loyal and faithful to God presents us with no other option. We submit because we can do no other and remain loyal and faithful. The challenge all people of faith have is to keep that light—our mission--front and center, because in a world full of darkness, the light can become overlooked, lost track of, missed, dismissed in the whirlwind of fears and rapidly unfolding events. And so we are wise to look for it, to seek for it, to know that it is there somewhere, and in seeking find it anew and receive renewed “energy, courage, and freedom to enact” our vocation as people of God's light. We do this because of our unwavering understanding that God is found there, in the light; and that salvation, AKA, an abundance of good and blessed things for all the nations—all people--is also found there.

Light is of course a metaphor for the abundance of God, the characteristics of Christ, the fruits of the Spirit, and all such good things you might care to name. God's light is also something we acknowledge symbolically...meaning, when we sing such songs as *This Little Light of Mine*, we proclaim the miracle of God's empowerment. When we hear of the Bethlehem Star, when we light the Advent wreath, when we place candles on the altar before us we're acknowledging the reality of God's will, desire and purposes which are forever seeking to become the animating force in our lives, and daily routines. And so to this end, we're not surprised that candles, lamps, flickering and fragile flames have since the most ancient of days been associated with religious practices and spaces—as they proclaim God's solution to dark side, to everything that weighs us down and limits our humanity and our potential.

As we consider the places in today's world where far greater light yet needs to shine, it is not the least unusual to glimpse God's light on our path, showing us the way. When we consider where such light is missing or in too short a supply God's light then reveals where we must go and what we must do and how we are to act as people of God's light. When we consider the

places where the light of God's goodness, charity, mercy and forgiveness have gone absent by force or ignorance or evil we understand where God is sending us out in faith to show others the way to those things most longed for. All of which is in keeping with the declaration at the prologue of John's Gospel, "that they [the nations of the world they, all people they, us they] that *they* may have life and have it abundantly." That is who we are, the bearers, the bringers of God's abundance, the people who follow the light and share the light because the life is life. Precisely here our daily task as Christ's own people, our ever-ongoing ministry in Christ's name and our identity as the baptized is realized. Not only is this little light of ours a huge motivation in our life, it is a HUGE responsibility. Indeed, everything that defines who and whose we are is lost if the light is hid.

To be clear, we fully embrace our high and holy calling as light-bearers among the darkness when we consider the fullness and richness of God's creation as a resource for all nations, not only those few capable of exploiting it at will, and when we respond to those set on pillaging our environment and altering our weather with an unequivocal "No!"

To be clear, we fully embrace our high and holy calling as light-bearers among the darkness when we resist forces at work intent upon designating public bathrooms as a place for government intervention, legislation and constraints, and government itself as an agent dictating and controlling gender identity...and we respond with an unequivocal "No!"

To be clear, we fully embrace our high and holy calling as light-bearers among the darkness when we fight for the rights of the poor who die needlessly and suffering agonizingly from diseases easily treated by health care they are unable to access; and so too, we are light-bearers among the darkness when states and judges and elected officials determine their jurisdiction extends to a woman's womb and we respond with an unequivocal "No!"

In all ways, great and small, from these just named to confronting the resurgent forces threatening Civil rights and religious liberties in our present age in whatever guise, we in truth and fact are God's light when we decide, "Yes we can!" When we get off the fence of indecision, inaction, ambiguity and fully become the person God has always willed for us to be, the person the world needs so many more of. And don't fret, no need to measure up to the intellectually and charismatic heights of a MLK Jr. here, merely embracing and living your faith as people of dark-defying-light is more than sufficient...is indeed, glorious beyond description. Like loaves and fishes, multiplied not due to special need or special privileged, but simply because all people require nourishment; we multiply God's light because without exception all human life requires it.

Praise be to God and amen.