The People Who Walk In Darkness Shall See A Great Light

That was Isaiah’s prophecy. He told the ancient Jews to trust in God and to have confidence that God would deliver them from their despair. God would lead them from darkness into the light.

For the ancient Jews, darkness was defeat and oppression. They had just come out of a disastrous war with Syria. One can only imagine the pain, the loss, and the hopelessness they had experienced... a pain that was still raw!

God heard his people’s cries and he sent them the prophet, Isaiah, to be a messenger of hope, to lead them out of despair.

*Isaiah’s words* spoke to the ancient Jews who believed the coming Messiah would return them to the glory days of King David’s rule.

*Isaiah’s words* spoke to the early Christians who thought the second coming of Christ would relieve them from Roman oppression.

*And Isaiah’s words* speak to us, as we search for light in our lives this Christmas.

Isaiah’s prophecy was fulfilled with the birth of Jesus, who was called:

“Wonderful Counselor” because he would rule with wisdom;

“Mighty God” because he was an expression of God’s power and presence among us;

“Everlasting Father” because he could be depended upon to look after the welfare of his people, and as;

“Prince of Peace,” because his reign would establish endless peace, with justice and righteousness until the end of time.

But that’s not the world we know...there’s darkness and oppression all around us. It’s in the news. It’s in our community. It’s in our hearts. So how do we get some of the light that Isaiah was talking about?

The writer of today’s Psalm knew. He wrote: “I lift up my eyes to the hills; from where is my help to come? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.”

And God works through us.

I was privileged to be a part of a grief support group here for the last ten weeks. We met and talked about our losses and in doing so we helped one another to heal.
That’s so characteristic of St. Matthew’s. We have a history of “caring for each other so that we can care for others.” I am so grateful to Fred Kornfeind for leading our group. Fred and his wife, Gina, have provided a truly meaningful and loving ministry of grief counseling and support—to this parish and to the larger community.

It gives me pleasure to introduce my friend and colleague, Fred Kornfeind, Fred:

I want to thank Brian and Betsy for giving me the opportunity to talk to you tonight. It gives me a chance to reflect on Brian's comment about caring for each other so that we can care for others and about my experience of being involved in this part of our community at St. Matthew's.

Brian mentioned those of us who walk in darkness have seen a great light...those who lived in the land of deep darkness - on them light has shined..." We had the opportunity to reflect on this in our group...the experience of walking in this darkness - the darkness of their grief and sadness...of being in the void created by the loss of a loved one...their daily struggle of moving from darkness (their suffering) into or nearer to the light...their sense of comfort created by their faith and sharing their faith with each other. Attempting to give their struggle to Christ who was born to take on this burden. Yes, these types of themes/issues come up in my work as a clinical psychologist in a chronic care setting. But the role of Christ and faith is often relegated to the Chaplain service. I had the chance to be part of this struggle of faith and the comfort of being with those whose faith gave them the light- the sense of hope that things would be okay even in their grief and darkness.

The Christmas Season brings the opportunity of light with the birth of Christ. It can also be a "new light" one that is bitter sweet, filled with more meaning at a deeper and even more profound (and possibly more painful) level, a sense of realness that may have never been experienced before given our modern lives that can lead to preoccupation with status, power, and money. Our group acknowledged that this Holiday Season had an element of heaviness and complexity that set it apart from past Christmas seasons...and we had the chance to be with this.

It was a privilege to be with members of our community and experience God. It is a reminder to me of the power of our community as I struggle with factors in my life that prevent me from being present with God, acknowledging my faith (or lack of), and connecting in meaningful ways with others.

The darkness that I mentioned earlier is not only defined by grief and loss. Members of our community of faith struggle with other manifestations of darkness - addiction, various forms of mental illness, the aftermath of abuse and atrocities in our personal lives. Isaiah's message can hopefully be applied here that our community can be there for those of us who struggle with these other forms of darkness. We are blessed to have Betsy, Brian, and the Pastoral Care Ministry to address this struggle, not only during this Christmas season, but throughout the year.
Christmas is not always the "Season of Joy" as portrayed in the popular media: the "Hallmark" or "Kodak" moments don't capture the complexity of our struggle. It can be a time for us to realize that there is hope with the birth of Christ so that he may endure suffering....

I would like to share a prayer Brian sent me about a woman's experience of coping with loss at Christmas Time. It reads:

“Such a loss! Such a keen and tearing pain. Even when I am in a crowded room, there is a loneliness I never knew existed.

“Comforting God, I have turned to you so many times for solace, and I come again. While the world is bright and sparkling, my heart feels leaden and has an emptiness that cannot be filled.

“Lord, how can I enter into this season of joy? In my head I celebrate your birth into this world, but in my everyday life, I am filled with a grief that runs so very deep. You blessed me with a loving relationship and now it is gone from my life. How can I be faithful to that love and the memory of that love and my sorrow in this season of "Rejoice!"?

“Tears are so close to the surface all the time and helpful friends who want to "keep me busy" don't seem to really understand that I need to embrace my grief. I am afraid of letting go of the sadness and losing the deep love connection I had.

“Instead of entering into the Rejoice of Christmas, I long for the sorrow of Lent. I beg you Lord, show me how the two are connected.

I ponder the name Emmanuel and know that it means "God with us." With us. With me in this world, in this sorrow. If I look beyond my pain, I know that you, too, suffered so much in this world. I never understood so clearly before that Emmanuel is what your nativity is really about. You are in my world, in my pain.

“Thank you, Lord, for the loved one you blessed my life with. Grant me now in my grief, a peace. Give me a comfort that might not make the tears go away, but that lets me feel your presence as you take up a place deep in my heart, with me.”

Thank you, Fred.

From darkness into the light, the author of this poem opened her heart to God. In a like way, I invite you to open your heart to God on this, one of the longest, darkest days of the year. Let his light shine in your heart and in your life.
In the words of Isaiah, trust in God and have confidence that God will deliver you from your despair. God would lead you from darkness into the light.

May God bless you, my beloved, this Christmas and always.