

Week 9

Isaiah 60:1-6 "Arise, Shine!"

Begin with prayer

Brilliant God,

Sometimes we wander around in deep, dull darkness. But Lord, we ask that we may be illuminated by your grace and love. We want to radiate and reflect the brilliance of your light.

Shine through us, so that we may share you with others.

In Jesus name we pray,

Amen

Read the text for today. (Suggestion: Go around and read it out loud, each person taking a verse.)

Ask: What stood out to you about this text? What, if anything, doesn't make sense? What caught your attention and sparked curiosity?

Isaiah is very clear: someday all will be bathed in a radiant, holy, shining light. In the beginning God's first act of creation was to create light. According to Genesis, God did not create the sun first, nor the stars, nor any source of light, but he created just light. Pure, radiant light.

The universe was born when light flashed in the deep darkness of empty chaos. From God's first light came life. After that first burst of cosmic radiance, stars were born. They blazed their light into space but eventually died out. From the ashes of those dead stars was created the very stuff of life itself: carbon. Genesis tells us that God made humankind from the dust of the earth. God created us out of the dust of long-dead stars. Something of their radiance has passed into our lives. We are stardust beings, created by God to bear our own kind of brilliance as God fashioned us in the divine image.

We were created in the light, from the light, and we still need light. We are drawn to it. Yet light remains a mystery. Isaiah 60 is also somewhat mysterious. On the one hand, this chapter famously opens by telling the people, "Arise, shine." A little later Isaiah predicts that other nations will be drawn, "to the brightness of *your* shining." But that makes it sound as though the source of the light is Israel itself. Yet this same chapter talks a great deal about the fact that it is ultimately *Yahweh* who shines *upon* his people Israel. "The glory of Yahweh rises upon you . . . The sun will no more be your light . . . for Yahweh will be your everlasting light." So who is doing the shining in this chapter: the people or God? It looks as though it is both.

Because the Lord God shines on Israel, they can also shine. However, the way Isaiah words this does not reduce the people of Israel to mirrors. He does not say, "Arise, *reflect*, for your light has come," but rather "Arise, *shine*." He does not say that nations will come to the brightness of what reflects off Israel as a result of God's light, but he says the nations will come to the brightness of *your* light.

It all seems a bit mixed up, and yet it all hangs together. Maybe we need to be so radical as to say, that because of who God is, we *ourselves* possess our own brightness. We are not just mirrors that reflect. We are made in the image of God; and we naturally radiate his light.

When you are talking about the light of the Almighty God and "reflecting his glory," all the typical categories of reflection and light don't seem to fit. In this case the original light is SO intense, SO radiant, SO holy, and SO good that it has a substance all its own. A substance and a righteousness so powerful,

that one cannot reflect the light without also being caught up in and *transformed* by it. Perhaps that is the sense in which we can be both shined upon, and shine in our own right, too.

But for Israel that meant getting used to something they were not accustomed to: that holy light was going to attract far more than people who looked, acted, and thought just like the rest of Israel. The God who created this richly diverse world by saying, “Let there be light,” is going to draw that diversity to himself by his light. Being part of God’s creation means welcoming all when they show up, as we ourselves wish to be welcomed.

Let’s talk about it:

- God’s light is transformative light. Some people may be drawn to the light, while others are afraid of what it might expose in their own lives. How have you seen these impulses in your own life?
- Jesus tells us in Matthew 5: “You are the light of the world, let your light so shine before others that they see your good work and praise your Father in heaven!” How does the command to shine make a difference for the way you live?
- Although the complete fulfillment of nations being drawn to the light is still a future reality, how does Matthew show that the fulfillment has already begun (read Matt. 2:9-11 with Isa. 60:1,3,6)?
- Paul says that when we live obedient lives, we “shine like stars in the universe” (Philippians 2:15). Where do you see God’s light shining in the people you encounter? In church? Your dorm or house? In your family?