



Do you dare to hope?

READ ISAIAH 60:1-6

Assyria, a brutal enemy of Jerusalem, conquered the city and took many of its residents back to Assyria as prisoners of war. Years later some of those prisoners were set free to return to their homes in Jerusalem, but what they found there was total destruction. Their homes and their beloved city lay in ruins. They sat down in those ruins and wept, feeling utterly hopeless.

Into that despair comes the words of Isaiah, telling the people to rise and shine, for the glory of God has risen upon them to light their darkness.

REMEMBER – Isaiah 60:1

Put your face in the sunlight.

God's bright glory has risen for you.

DIVE DEEPER

Consider this from theologian Callie Plunket-Brewton's commentary on Isaiah 60 at workingpreacher.org:

"... Biblical prophecy is not flat prediction but is, rather, an invitation to change, to be empowered, and, sometimes, to repent. Within Zion's call to witness in Isaiah 60:1-6 is also a call to the community to believe in the vision, to endure the present hardship, and, with God, to bring the vision into reality. ... These visions were meant to sustain and empower people to create and to build, to remain faithful, and to love their God and each other. Not one of those acts is passive or dreamy but requires the commitment and courage that a shared vision of a better future can produce."

What do you think? Does our church have a shared vision of a better future, and the commitment and courage that produces? If so, what next? If not, how do we get it?

NEXT WEEK: Luke 1:26-38

WONDER

DAY 1: The Israelites return to a destroyed homeland feeling utterly hopeless. Into their despair, Isaiah proclaims these powerful words of hope. How would that feel? Is it possible to entertain the idea of hope in the midst of your deepest grief? Why, or why not?

WONDER

DAY 2: How do these words of hope sound to the Israelites? Are they a gift, like light in the darkness? Are they absurd? Are they a fairy tale? Are they patronizing? Are they believable? How do these words sound to you?

RESURRECTION

DAY 3: Do you dare to believe that the light has come? Why, or why not?

PROGRESS

DAY 4: Let's say that you **do** dare to believe that the light of Jesus is dawning in the world. How does that change you? How do you live differently? Does this light compel you forward? How can this story empower you?

RESURRECTION

DAY 5: What exactly does the light of Jesus dawning in the world look like today? What parts of our world need this kind of light? Where is there overwhelming darkness right now? Think about the most impossible situation you're facing in your life. Think about the most impossible situation facing your community, your church, your nation or the world. Can Isaiah's words speak into any of that? Do they change anything? Would it make any difference at all if, in our despair, we learned to "put our faces in the sunlight" and enter into the hope that Isaiah proclaims?

PROGRESS

DAY 6: Does this kind of hope allow us to remain complacent? Is that the way it works? Or does this hope demand action, complicity or responsibility on our part? Is there a relationship between our hope and our actions?

RELATIONSHIP

DAY 7: If Advent is meant to stir our hope that Jesus is a light dawning into the darkness of this world ... how are you living into Advent today? Are you stirred up? What are you doing this season, on some of the darkest days of the year, to reveal the hope this story proclaims?