

What People Are Looking For

Isaiah 9: 1-4

It was night and, in the pool of light cast by the streetlight, he was bent over looking for something. “Have you lost something?” I asked.

“Yes, I am looking for my key? My apartment building is over there and I dropped the key before I could unlock the door.”

“Maybe I can help. So, is this where you dropped it?”

“No, actually I dropped it over by the front door.”

“Then why are you looking here?”

“Well, the light is much better over here.”

Some twenty-seven centuries ago, the prophet Isaiah proclaimed, “There will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined.” Isaiah’s people had lost their way, had lost the key to who they were: the people Yahweh God had chosen to proclaim the light of God’s blessing to the world.

They had lost their way long ago without realizing it. Things seemed to have been going so well. Kings David then Solomon had led the nation Israel to a place of prominence among the nations of their region, but they had sold out to a god who made them forget who they were. Now, in the time of suffering, when the armies of powerful neighbors poised to swallow them up, there seemed nowhere for the people to turn. They looked within themselves and did not recognize what they had become. When they tried to plant their feet, there seemed to be no solid grounding. Despair replaced patriotism and darkness descended. In that darkness, Isaiah spoke, “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.”

What was that light? When Christians hear Isaiah’s proclamation at the beginning of Advent, largely thanks to Handel’s *Messiah*, we identify the light as Jesus. For Israel, in the eighth century BCE, the light was hope – a reason to hope that their identity as a people of Yahweh God was still valid. Ancient Israel was looking for a reason to hope. The people who lived at the time of the coming of Jesus were looking for a reason to hope. What are people today looking for?

What are we looking for today? What are you looking for? Is it a reason to hope? For what are you hoping today?

Have you been watching the Presidential primaries? Are you following the debates and the issues? Change seems to be a key word for all the Presidential candidates. Washington outsiders and insiders alike, those with years of government experience or very little, all plan to bring about change. It’s a very popular issue this year. I am hoping for some change as well. I hope we will change from a human race divided by ethnicity and religion to a humanity living out the unity of our creator. I hope this world will change by finding ways to cooperate, to share the wealth and recover the health of this planet?

I hope that this nation will change to place our trust not so much in military might, but in its founding ideals and in its role as a light of hope to all people all people – that our government will reflect the will of the people, to work together not as divided, but as united states. I hope that this city will change by overcoming its history of segregation and division to become a place of opportunity and possibility. I hope that this congregation will continue to change into a growing community of seekers with a powerful message of invitation to bring questions, confusion, and insight to walk the journey with intentionality and honesty. I hope we will continue to make the changes in our lives that are leading us to grow and mature as persons, as partners, as parents, and as people of faith.

Is there a reason to hope? Is there a vision, a story to inspire our hope? I think so. As Christians, followers of the way of Jesus, we have a story that supports us and points us forward. The Bible is our story, though not all of our story. In it we find a mirror for our lives and our own journeys.

The tradition is our story. The faith of those who came before us inspires our hope. It enables us to believe in mystery and to trust in unexpected possibilities, in the power of vision. Their words give us hope and direction. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke many words filled with light, hope, faith, and inspiration. He addressed issues of war and poverty as much as racism. He once said:

With faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair
the stone of hope.

With faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our
nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood.

Remaining Awake through a Great Revolution,
Martin Luther King, Jr. National Cathedral

On a somewhat less exalted level, yet also inspiring and fascinating, there was an amazing story on YouTube this week. It was about a kitten and a crow. This crow apparently adopted a kitten. The crow brought the kitten food, protected it from harm, and even played with it. The affection was returned by the kitten. Such a thing could not happen, but it did. It was just a curious little story about two animals, but our lives are filled with stories that challenge us to trust the miraculous and believe in the mysterious.

You and I each have a story and we share a common story. These stories light our journey into the future. Our faith story comes from the Bible, from the tradition, and from those who have walked before us -- on whose shoulders we stand, and from our own experience. Our stories do not offer us certainty about God or about the future. Life does not promise certainty about how our lives turn out our story. It offers us presence – the presence of light, of community, and of God on the journey.

We are on a journey, each of us and all of us. Whether we know it or not, we are on a journey through life. It may be that you are lost or alone on some forgotten highway. It may be that you are hurtling along on a stretch of Interstate, doing ninety miles per hour,

without a clue as to where you are going. Maybe you just want to get off at the next exit or the nearest rest stop?

We are on a journey. Our stories give us hope and light. They help us know who we are. They help us choose where we are going. They unite us with each other and all of humanity in a common fate and a shared possibility. This is where God is actively making the divine visible today – on the journey and in the changes. We live in a world where people are looking for a reason to hope. That’s why so many run after charlatans and others who promise the sky. As people of faith, we believe there is reason to hope. We also acknowledge that hope does not lie along the path of easy answers or simple solutions. Still, we hope. As people of faith and travelers on the journey, we again find reason to hope in words spoken by Martin Luther King, Jr. when he accepted the Nobel Peace Prize: “I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. (MLK, Jr. from Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech

Are you hoping to find friends on your journey? You may well find them here in this community of faith. Are you looking for a place to ask hard questions about life and faith? Would you like to find support for your work to find answers that are right for you? If you are, then this may be your place.

Journey has meaning when it is integrated around faithful living, a congregation shaping individual and shared ministries on the bedrock themes of justice, peacemaking, and inclusive love. *Journey* has integrity when it reflects the biblical themes of death, new birth, the transformation of life, and growth in the Spirit. Those who come seeking a community that provides love and support on life’s journey – a group of people gathered in the Spirit, and encourages integrity in the seeking and grace in the process – are welcome here. You are welcome here.

The author of the little book *Invitations* has inspired so many of us here at Crossroads will have the final word today. He reminds us that the Exodus story of the journey of the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt

speaks to us of a journey to be taken by individuals, by nations, [and] by the human race. It is both a corporate hope for God’s world and an exemplar of an individual journey. We are each personally called to set out for a new land. We are each called to unearth our treasure, to live our giftedness, to have a whale of a time doing what we are for and thereby to contribute to the corporate exodus of humanity. (Francis Dewar, *Invitations*)

Now, that’s what I’m looking for!