

Pastor Daniel Waldschmidt - January 22nd, 2017 – Isaiah 9:1-4

A theme that we have heard throughout the season of Epiphany has been that the light of Christ shines in the darkness. It started at the beginning of Epiphany with the star shining to lead the Wise Men to worship the baby Jesus. That theme of light shining in the darkness continues in our Isaiah reading today: **“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned” (Isaiah 9:2)**. Today we will see that the Lord Jesus gives light to those in darkness. He does this 1. by his actions and he does this 2. by his words.

First, by his *actions* Jesus gives light to those in darkness. “Darkness” is sometimes a metaphor for suffering. And no one had undergone more suffering than the people in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali. Our lesson begins: **Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali (Isaiah 9:1)**. Zebulun and Naphtali were two of the 12 tribes of Israel. Each tribe got their own section of land. The thing you have to know about the land of Zebulun and Naphtali was that it was pummeled by war. Zebulun and Naphtali were located in the top north of Israel and when invading armies came to attack Israel they many times came from the north, so Zebulun and Naphtali were the first to get hit. Living in Zebulun and Naphtali would be kind of like living in Aleppo in Syria today. Aleppo is a town in Syria that has been bombed many times in the past year. The land of Zebulun and Naphtali invaded were many times invaded by foreign armies. At the time of Isaiah, Zebulun and Naphtali were about to be invaded by the king of Assyria. In 2 Kings 15:29 we read, **“Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came and took all the land of Naphtali, and deported the people to Assyria.”**

The people of Zebulun and Naphtali sat in deep darkness and misery. To add insult to injury, by the time of Jesus the people of Zebulun and Naphtali were looked down on. For example, Nazareth was also in that region and when Nathaniel heard that Jesus was from Nazareth he said, “Nazareth? Can anything good come from there?”

So Zebulun and Naphtali had a long history of suffering and a long history of being looked down on. And that’s why Jesus decided to go and live in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. Our Gospel for today says: **“Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—¹⁴ to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: ¹⁵“Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the**

Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, ¹⁶ the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned" (Matthew 4:13-16).

Jesus goes and lives among those with a long history of suffering and a long history of being looked down on. And what does he do for them? He heals all their diseases. Our Gospel ends with these words: **"News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and he healed them." (Matthew 4:24).** By healing all their diseases Jesus gives light to those who were in gloom and darkness.

Maybe you sometimes feel like the people of Zebulun and Naphtali. Maybe you sometimes feel like everything bad happens to you. If you feel that way then this is the Bible story for you. Look what Jesus does: He goes and he lives among those who have suffered the most and he heals them. Jesus sees your pain. And he will heal you. If not now, in the resurrection.

Jesus these people free from the things that were oppressing them. It's like our Isaiah lesson says: **"you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor."** (Isaiah 9:4). Some of the people were held captive by demons. Jesus set them free. Some people were held captive by being paralyzed. Jesus set them free. Of course what holds us captive the most is sin. Jesus set us free from our sin by his death and the cross. And because Jesus has liberated us from sin by his death on the cross, someday we will also be liberated from all our physical sufferings when Jesus restores all of our bodies in the resurrection. **The Lord Jesus gives light to those who are in darkness by his actions.**

The Lord Jesus also gives light by his *words*. In the verses just before our Isaiah lesson, it says: **"Consult God's instruction [in the Bible]. If anyone does not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn. ... They will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness" (Isaiah 8:20-22).** If we do not have God's Word, we are in utter darkness.

By his *action* on the cross, Jesus took away the sins of the world. But we are still in the dark unless someone tells us about Jesus' death on the cross and what that means for us. That's why Jesus went around preaching God's

Word. Our Gospel says, **"From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." ...**
23 Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom." (Matthew 4:17, 23). Jesus gave light to those in darkness by his *words*, by his teaching and preaching. Jesus spoke words of law. He held up God's perfect standards and showed people how they fell short. But Jesus also preached the gospel. In Sunday school today, the kids are going to be hearing a story about when some people lowered down to Jesus a paralyzed man through a hole in the roof, and Jesus said to the man, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Those words of forgiveness from Jesus shined light into the heart of that paralyzed man. So Jesus spoke words of law and gospel. He also spoke words of instruction to tell his followers how God wanted them to live. It says in Psalm 119: "Your words a lamp to my feet and a light for my path." Jesus' teaching gave his disciples moral instructions for how to live their life. Our second lesson reflects the teaching of Jesus when it says: **"Anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness."** So Jesus gave light with his words by speaking law and gospel and giving instruction for the Christian life.

Not only did Jesus himself speak God's word, but he also called others to speak God's word. He called Peter and Andrew and James and John and said, "I will make you fishers of men." You fish for people by using your words to tell others about Jesus. Our Isaiah passage said that Jesus would bring light to **"Galilee of the Gentiles."** The Gentiles were people who did not know God's word. They were in the dark. After Jesus was raised from the dead he told his disciples to meet him in Galilee (Matt 28:10, 16). And when the disciples met him in Galilee, Jesus told them, **"Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20).**

There are a lot of people in our world who are in the dark. There are a lot of people who do not know what we know. Let your prayer every day be: Lord, make me a fisher of men. Please give me the words to communicate to other people this simple truth: "Jesus died to take away our sins. Whoever believes in him has eternal life." You'll find that those simple words send a flood of light into people's lives. This world can be a dark place. There's lots of physical suffering. There's lot of emotional guilt that can send people into darkness. By his actions and by his words, Jesus bursts through that darkness and brings light to me and to you and to all the people of the world. Amen.

