

WELCOME 12 January 2020 – 1 Epiphany '20 A
EVERYDAY EPIPHANY: THE LIGHT STRENGTHENS

Isaiah 42:1-9

Good morning! Welcome to worship! It is great to have you here. Please stay w/ us for morning tea...time to be together
It's called S.A.D....Seasonal Affective Disorder. It's a form of depression common in places with prolonged dark
winters...where for days on end you experience little to no natural sunlight. The darkness literally wears you out...drains
you...sucks the life right out of you. Prolonged darkness makes you sick & the only cure is light.

But even more than our mental health...light also has physical health benefits. Researchers at the University of
Colorado have been experimenting using light to amplify a specific gene that strengthens blood vessels & offers
protection against heart attacks. We've always heard that sunlight is a great disinfectant...& some time outside was
good for us...but grandma was smarter than we ever recognized.

Exposure to the light of Christ also has health benefits that protect us in dark times. Prolonged exposure to Christ,
through his Word, among his people turns our lives more & more toward him like a plant to the sun. It conforms us to his
image & reveals our true identity. It gives us a clear vision for each day and unfailing hope & strength so we can live out
our calling in this world.

The Light of Christ strengthens & we'll explore how it does that today personally for each one of us.

And don't forget...the crucial question we each need to answer as we begin this new year together... What would it take
for you to **BE** an epiphany...a revelation of the light & life & love of Christ to those around you? What if you could live 2020
with 20/20 vision? What if you really could live 365 days with sheer purpose...on purpose?

Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

*Most wonderful God, Father of great love...foolish & flawed though we are, we delight in your beloved Son. As in his
name we gather in this house of many praises, may the heavens split apart for us. Give us clear sight of that Light &
Love that transforms our common days with a beauty not of our making & transforms us in ways we have not yet
imagined. Give your Spirit free rein in us until we reflect your image to the world. Through Christ who is alone Lord &
Saviour - Amen*

1 EPIPHANY '20 A – EVERYDAY EPIPHANY: THE LIGHT STRENGTHENS

FAITH CHAT:

1. If you could hire a superhero to save the world, what would you tell them to do first?
2. What is one place in your life that you would like to be strengthened this year?

The name Keith Allen Barton shouldn't mean anything to you...it didn't to me either until I read that his 1st request for early release from prison had been denied. 6 years ago this week he was convicted on a variety of charges stemming from his con artistry. He pretended to be a Dr & sold fake cures/phony treatments to people with serious life-threatening illnesses. His "specialty" was to find someone w/ cancer or HIV & tell them his treatment could "nip it in the bud/stop it before it spreads." He was a liar & stole 1000s of \$\$ from the sick, vulnerable, weak, desperate, & defenceless. 9-yr-old girl died from his "treatment." He was convicted & sentenced & is spending long years as a resident of the California prison system.

I was thinking about him when I read that a startling number of people had been arrested over the past months here in Australia for arson & bushfire-related offenses at least 1 of whom was a volunteer with the RFS...Pretending to be helping when in reality causing harm happens all over. It's especially disheartening when we find it in someone we desperately want to trust/rely on when life has gone pear-shaped... turned ugly...crunch time...in the crucible & heat's on. We want someone we can trust.

What we just heard from Isaiah, comes at a time like that. Isaiah spoke into the lives of God's people in the crunch time of military destruction, national annihilation, exile & captivity. But as those events unfolded Isaiah always reiterated God's desire to save not destroy. *"You will be smashed like a piece of pottery — shattered so completely that there won't be a piece big enough to carry coals from a fireplace or a little water from the well."* This is what the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel, says: *"Only in returning to me & resting in me will you be saved. In quietness & confidence is your strength..."* But his pleas fell on deaf ears *"But you would have none of it. You said, 'No, we will get our help from Egypt..."* – Is 30:14-16

Not only did God's people turn & get "no help" from the *armies* of Egypt (part of the prob) but they also began to turn their hearts to the *gods* of the other nations. Isaiah had a word from God on that too. *"Present the case for your idols"* says the Lord. *"Let them show what they can do...In fact, do anything—good or bad! Do something that will amaze & frighten us. But no! You are less than nothing & can do nothing at all. Those who choose you pollute themselves."* They continued to sow the seeds of their own destruction...so destruction came. *See, they are all foolish, worthless things. All your idols are as empty as the wind.* – Is 41:21, 23-24, 29 Think about the sick, vulnerable, weak & grasping at hope turning to a fake Dr...God pleads w/ his people to turn to the only truly trustworthy truly reliable genuine security of a relationship w/ him: *"Idols are merely things of silver & gold, shaped by human hands. They have mouths but cannot speak, & eyes but cannot see. They have ears but cannot hear, & noses but cannot smell. They have hands but cannot feel, & feet but cannot walk, & throats but cannot make a sound. Those who make idols are just like them, as are all who trust in them. O Israel, trust the Lord! He is your helper & your shield."* – Ps 115:4-9

In contrast to the impotence & powerlessness & fakery of idols & other gods – other objects of human worship devotion allegiance...God promises... *"Look at my **servant**, whom I strengthen. He is my chosen one, who pleases me. I have put my Spirit upon him. He will bring **justice** to the nations."* 1st look at that word "justice." Now most of us have a picture of that in our heads...bad guys go to jail. People who do bad things are punished. That's our justice...judicial justice...retributive justice. That's **NOT** Biblical justice.

Biblical justice (Heb word *mishpat*) means to put everything right where it belongs. To put things right. Biblical justice is about restoration not retribution. The difference? I steal your car & wreck it...it's totalled. Police catch me & put me in jail. Now...if I steal your car I deserve to go to jail...but that doesn't fix things for you. You're still out 1 car. *Mishpat* is about restoring & re-establishing good & making right. For God's people that was the job of the king. To administer God's justice which puts everything in its proper order & place & relationship. To bring *justice to the nations* means to ensure that all things are in accord w/ what is right & that's the king's job a king with power...with force behind his voice...with capacity to enforce what's right right now. Power always corrupts.

But look at the One God sends to do that...the One God sends to make all things right with his people & among the nations...in whom God delights. *My **servant***...not my enforcer/strongman/leg-breaker...*Note especially* this servant in whom God delights & is sent by God to bring about what God desires (justice) *He will not **shout** or **raise his voice in public***. Hebrew scholars say the words Isaiah uses there...what we have trans as *shout* literally means to shout down/talk over/drown out...*raise his voice in public* means he's not going to manipulate public discourse...spin...*This servant will accomplish the work of a king (justice) w/o the methods of a king (force messaging & spin & doubletalk or shouting his*

opponents off the public square)...Instead of the “usual methods,” he will make all things right – bring justice...By. Serving...

What's that going to look like? Isaiah tells us as his promise from God (prophecy) goes on...Is 49, 50, 52 & 53 all point to the good news that when this servant king sent by the Father to bring justice to the nations to put all things right among all people does his work he will do it through suffering: *“He was despised & rejected — a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. We turned our backs on him & looked the other way. He was despised, & we did not care. Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. We thought his troubles were a punishment from God; a punishment for his own sins! But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. By his wounds we are healed.”* – Is 53:3-5

How does that work? What's that going to look like? *He will not crush the weakest reed or put out a flickering candle.* This serving king will serve/bring justice/put all things right by drawing to himself the vulnerable fragile in danger...those who seem low & inferior & despised by the world...who have no power of their own...Maybe whose wounds you cannot see. Like this...Scholars say that word *weakest or bruised reed*...implies a stalk of grain that is bent after a strong wind/hailstorm such that it never produces grain. Looks ok? Odd? But it is dying... suffered a death blow. When your appendix bursts & you aren't bleeding from an open wound but you are in fact dying inside...When your spleen is ruptured in a car accident & you don't have a broken bone or visible injury but you are dying inside...I know lots of folks who at any given moment are dying inside from wounds & injuries no one can see but are just as deadly as a gunshot to the heart.

This serving king will draw to himself the vulnerable...fragile...in danger...dying - Not to put them out of their misery but to strengthen: *He will bring justice to all who have been wronged.* Remember - Biblical justice is about restoring...about wholeness The Hebrew words *mishpat tzedekah & shalom* – justice righteousness & peace all weave together in the Scriptures to give us a picture of what God intends: Everything right. Everything in harmony. Everything in unity. Everything exactly as God desires & designs. Absolute well-being. This serving king comes to the broken & battered & beat down – to those at the end of their rope so that he can strengthen & restore... bring life in its fullest abundance. He comes to the stumbling & dying & distressed – to the hopeless & helpless troubled & confused so that he can redeem & reclaim & restore...To heal absolutely everything that's wrong with the world. (super hero you thought of earlier...won't need 'em)To establish God's rule where there is no need for retribution-style justice because all things are already just – righteous – at peace/shalom.

But how...when missiles are flying & fires are burning & we have no idea what might come next...vs 5-*“God, the Lord, created the heavens & stretched them out. He created the earth & everything in it. He gives breath to everyone, life to everyone who walks the earth.”*

The Sovereign Lord who made all things according to His own plan & pleasure will endow this serving king with his Spirit. His authority & delight will reside in this king...And then Jesus showed up...*Then Jesus went from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John...After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened & he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove settling on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy.”* – Mt 3:13-17

Then Jesus returned to Galilee, filled with the Holy Spirit's power...When he came to the village of Nazareth, his boyhood home, he went as usual to the synagogue on the Sabbath & stood up to read the Scriptures. The scroll of Isaiah...was handed to him. He found the place where this was written: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, & that the time of the Lord's favour has come.”...Then he began to speak to them. “The Scripture you've just heard has been fulfilled this very day!” - Lk 4:14-21

The unmistakable good news is that Jesus is God's promised servant king who lives by the power of the Spirit in perfect harmony/unity with the Father...He accomplishes what no earthly king could do. He makes all things right by his life/death/rez & He continues to do so in you & me through his Holy Spirit unleashed in us...And that promise is imbedded in vs 4 - *He will not falter or lose heart until justice prevails throughout the earth. Even distant lands beyond the sea will wait for his instruction.* Nothing halts the work of the servant king...in whom God's Spirit dwells...in whom the Father delights Not even death stops the advance of God's reign of justice righteousness & peace. Nothing stems the flow of grace & love from the Father that reclaims his sinful world for his purposes. In fact death is what undoes sin & death because Christ rises in victory over the grave, sin & evil.

Then Isaiah shifts to the response of God's faithful people...vs 6-7...*I, the Lord, have called you to demonstrate my righteousness. I will take you by the hand & guard you, & I will give you to my people, Israel, as a symbol of my covenant with*

them. You will be a light to guide the nations. You will open the eyes of the blind. You will free the captives from prison, releasing those who sit in dark dungeons.

We who have been taken by the hand are now sent as agents of that *mishpat tzedekah & shalom* – justice righteousness & peace. It's on us...to draw near to those who are bruised weak...faltering hearts & lives around us & point to the light of Christ that heals & strengthens...restores & makes all things new. That 2nd Faith Chat question...What is one place in your life that you would like to be strengthened this year? Hear this promise from Matthew 12:21 where Matthew picks up Is 42 but translates the end this way...*And his name will be the hope of all the world.* The light of Christ alone conforms us to his image & reveals our true identity as children of the Heavenly Father. It gives us a clear vision for each day & unfailing hope in whatever we encounter in this world.

Quick story...You know we just moved. One of the boxes that has followed us now in 3 moves is this one: my prayer journals. Nobody else needs to ever read them...I don't want my kids to make a book of them when I die...just throw them out. They're for me...record of the light of Christ piercing through often in some very dark days...long seasons of struggle sadness or confusion...Each page is light in my heart...a lamp to my feet...each day turns me more toward Jesus like a flower to sun...true hope

If I am ever an epiphany of Christ's light to someone...it's from this daily exposure to Christ through his Word...it's because Jesus has spoken & my heart has responded in obedience & trust...his saving love & work for me takes hold...and then we live that out together... *And his name will be the hope of all the world*

Let's pray... **Lord Jesus, thank you for being God's love made real for us. Thank you for being God with us. Thank you that through you we are named as your brothers and sisters, children of our heavenly Father. Pour out your Spirit again today that we too might bear your righteousness, justice peace and love to the world. We pray in your name...Amen.**