

WELCOME 26 January 2020 – 3 Epiphany '20 A

EVERYDAY EPIPHANY: THE LIGHT REIGNS

Isaiah 9:1-7

Good morning & Welcome to Living Water Fellowship! Special welcome to our visitors and guests...It is wonderful that you are all here! It's our privilege & joy to serve you in worship today. Please stay for morning tea after worship we'd love a chance to get to know you better. Happy Australia Day!

It's called Second Coming Type. It's the largest type font used by newspaper editors around the world & saved for headlines of extreme importance: earth-moving, world changing & life-defining.

If Isaiah was a newspaper editor, Isaiah 9 would be written in 'Second Coming Type' The greatest news ever told...*“Nevertheless, that time of darkness & despair will not go on forever...For a child is born to us, a son is given to us...His government & its peace will never end. He will rule with fairness & justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity.”* **THAT** news is earth-moving, world changing & life-defining & the world needs to see/hear/know. To miss **THIS** news is to be trapped in darkness & despair. Isaiah goes all out, placing the spotlight on this message so that the whole world can see it, hear it, celebrate it & pass it on.

We'll explore and experience that together today as we continue to celebrate the coming of Christ...the light of the world...The Light that Reigns over every darkness & drives out every shadow. Light that reigns now & for all eternity.

Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Holy God, you knew us before we knew ourselves. You set us apart even now to be your servants. Create in us hearts worthy to be your prophets that we might go where you send us, & speak the Word that you give us. Through the power of your Holy Spirit, place your promises on our lips, your grace in our hearts & your power in our lives so that everywhere we are your Kingdom is seen & claims hearts & lives in your love for all eternity... In the name of your beloved Son Jesus we pray. Amen.

3 EPIPHANY '20 A – EVERYDAY EPIPHANY: THE LIGHT REIGNS

FAITH CHAT:

1. Where do you see darkness in 21st century Australia? How does it impact you?
2. What is the best way to celebrate Australia Day? What are we celebrating?

I think the best way to celebrate Australia Day is to remind ourselves again & again of what I call Australia's Unique Prophetic Mandate. Remember...before Captain James Cook sailed up the coastline & into the territorial waters of this great continent, Portuguese Captain Pedro Fernandez de Quiros was part of a team of explorers who sailed the Pacific looking for what they called the "*great terra australis*." In 1606 de Quiros landed on what we call Vanuatu & declared:

"Let the heavens, the earth, the waters with all their creatures & all those here present witness that I, Captain Pedro Fernandez de Quiros...in the name of Jesus Christ...hoist this emblem of the Holy Cross on which (Jesus Christ) was crucified & whereon He gave His life for the ransom & remedy of all the human race...on this Day of Pentecost, 14 May 1606..." "I take possession of all this part of the South as far as the pole in the name of Jesus...Which from now on shall be called the Southern land of the Holy Ghost ...& this always & forever...& to the end that to all natives, in all the said lands, the holy & sacred evangel may be preached zealously & openly."

No other country has ever in human history been claimed for Jesus...always king, queen, country of conquest...conqueror. But right where we call our earthly home...this magnificent Portuguese seafarer prophesies what the Scriptures declare: *The earth is the Lord's, & everything in it. The world & all its people belong to him.* – Ps 24:1 We ought over/over again affirm/declare what de Quiros knew w/o ever setting his boots here: God wants his love & his life & his promises to be proclaimed & lived **HERE** because the Father, in Jesus Christ, has claimed it & all its inhabitants as his own for his purpose in his Kingdom. *For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, & through him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven & on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross.* – Col 1:19-20 everything includes Oz

Ya know there's a "but" in there somewhere...But...we just made a list, w/o much effort, of how our daily experience shows that the darkness is as present & potent as ever. Despite prophetic mandate. Despite Father's claim in Christ. Despite best human effort...Darkness hasn't gone anywhere. I grew up singing the old hymn, "Still your children wander homeless. Still the hungry cry for bread. Still the captives long for freedom. Still in grief we mourn our dead." Still. We don't have to look far & it gets dark pretty quickly.

Just like in Isaiah's day...invading armies, corruption among the leadership, fake religion, phony faith leaders, interpersonal rivalry & aggression (dog-eat-dog), social & moral collapse, international aggression & betrayals, success at the expense of someone else, self-centered living...all the stuff we listed just without smartphones & the internet.

Isaiah spends most of his ministry calling that stuff out. He mourns the derelict behavior of his countrymen. He grieves the moral/social decay. He suffers the spiritual rot destroying God's people: *Listen, O heavens! Pay attention, earth! This is what the Lord says: "The children I raised & cared for have rebelled against me. Even an ox knows its owner, & a donkey recognizes its master's care; but Israel doesn't know its master. My people don't recognize my care for them."* Oh, what a sinful nation they are — loaded down with a burden of guilt. They are evil people, corrupt children who have rejected the Lord. They have despised the Holy One of Israel & turned their backs on him. – Is 1:2-4 Compare your "darkness list" to his...See any similarities? Sure...

Yet Isaiah never relents from proclaiming that God has a different future in mind: "*Come now, let's settle this,*" says the Lord. "*Though your sins are like scarlet, I will make them as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, I will make them white as wool. If you will only obey me, you will have plenty to eat. But if you turn away & refuse to listen, you will be devoured by the sword of your enemies. I, the Lord, have spoken!*" – Is 1:18-20 Isaiah again/repeats God's call to come back...to turn to him as their only source of hope & life & strength...to wholeheartedly give up their anxious grabbing for mastery & control & autonomy...the whole dog's breakfast of other idols & attachments & objects of devotion & full submission...so that their hearts & lives were attuned to the Father & him only..."*plenty to eat*" – total satisfaction, life at its fullest, complete peace & restoration harmony & rest...renewal unlike anything imaginable, contentment so deep nothing disturbs it...*I the Lord have spoken...*

Deeply imbedded in that call to return to complete trust in Yahweh; woven into the fabric of God's desire to reclaim his rebellious creation is the grace-filled promise that even the current season of darkness...current wave of shadows... this moment of desolation/sadness/grief/gloom would be curtailed by the Father's love: *Nevertheless, that time of darkness & despair will not go on forever.* You see it...Even the just punishment for sin is going to be absorbed by the Father's love...*The land of Zebulun & Naphtali will be humbled, but there will be a time in the future when Galilee of the Gentiles, which lies along the road that runs between the Jordan & the sea, will be filled with glory...*In the midst of the darkness the promise of light bursts forth...Father's glory will wipe away every trace of darkness/sin/death...*The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine...*

You see there's a powerful transformation that happens here & I think I've read this verse a million times & missed it...*the people who walk in darkness*...Biblically "to walk" means to exist/live-over-the-long-term/define yourself by how you "walk." I know people who define their lives by darkness...darkness is their identity...darkness, anything & everything that somehow upsets them cramps their style interferes with them getting their way or what they want or that's wrong in the world from their point of view...Never happy. Never satisfied w/ even the best of someone else's efforts. They see the world through the lens of darkness...Nearly nothing is ever right, bright light or good...You've heard me use the expression "gorilla grimness." That dark scowling frowning bitter dour sense that everything's wrong & nothing's right & it somehow all has landed in their lap like a bowl of spilled hot soup. Get ready...

God promises that when his love for his lost creation/his rebellious sinful people reaches its highest most powerful expression...even those hard hearts & frigid souls will at least recognize...light. That God will move in such a powerful way that every heart will be shaken & every life transformed.

For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. 3 times Isaiah points to the birth of A SON as that highest most powerful most visible expression of God's love that transforms this broken world & our sin-twisted hearts..."*...the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son & will call him Immanuel, which means 'God is with us.'*" – Is 7:14

Out of the stump of David's family will grow a shoot - yes, a new Branch bearing fruit from the old root. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him - the Spirit of wisdom & understanding, the Spirit of counsel & might, the Spirit of knowledge & the fear of the Lord... He will wear righteousness like a belt & truth like an undergarment. – Is 11:1, 2, 5

The work of that Son? Not to scold or punish, threaten or destroy. Only grace only forgiveness only love only the great exchange of the Sinless for sinners. *For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness & transferred us into the Kingdom of his beloved Son, who purchased our freedom & forgave our sins.* – Col 1:13-14 When that light breaks...when the darkness is scattered...when the shadow of death is driven back – when the gloom of evil is shattered...It is all by the work of the Son whose life/death/resurrection reconciles the world to the Father & puts an end to sin evil darkness brokenness & death.

This is not the work of politician party or policy...not a teacher guru or moral model not soldier statesman or strongman...Jesus comes as Prophet Priest & King, Son Shepherd & Servant, Lion Lamb & Lord...He alone delivers us from self to salvation. And the best news of all...darkness no matter how deep no matter how pervasive no matter how threatening...Will. Not. Last. Forever...under *NO CIRCUMSTANCES* does the Father allow darkness a permanent place in the presence & power of the Son.

Deeply imbedded in that call to return to complete trust in Yahweh; woven into the fabric of God's desire to reclaim his rebellious creation is the grace-filled promise that even the current season of darkness...current wave of shadows... this moment of desolation/sadness/grief/gloom would be curtailed by the Father's love: *Nevertheless, that time of darkness & despair will not go on forever.* But of the Son given to us...*His government & its peace will never end. He will rule with righteousness & justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity.*

Now I don't ever do this...set something up & leave you hanging until next week... to see where it goes...But I'm going to give you one more word from Isaiah...and leave it & then build on it for the next 4 Sundays...

I guess you'll just have to come back! Because...

THAT news is earth-moving, world changing & life-defining & the world needs to see/hear/know. To miss **THIS** news to be left out of this great announcement is to be trapped in darkness & despair. Isaiah goes all out, placing the spotlight on this message so that the whole world can see it, hear it, celebrate it & pass it on.

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the messenger who brings good news, the good news of peace & salvation, the news that the God of Israel reigns! – Is 52:7

Let's pray...**Lord Jesus take over. Take all of me & all that I have for your kingdom. You alone are my hope, my future, my security, my peace & my joy. Use my life so that many more may be drawn to your feet to worship you as their King. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amem.**