

of Discipleship

January 7, 2018

Day 1: Isaiah 60:1

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

The light recalls God's early act in creation. God said, "Let there be light" and the darkness was cast away. *Arise* means to get up from your present state and stand. The light of God is here and we can reflect that light to the nations. The nations shall see a bright light in the distance and be drawn to it. The glory of the Lord is the salvation of the people and their vindication. Isaiah has said earlier that the people have paid double for all their sins (Isaiah 40:1-3). This verse gives us direction as to how we should respond to God's love. We are to reflect God's love to the whole world so that they might see and be drawn to the light. The assumption is that the people will choose light.

Question: Do you hear this verse as the dawn? Or light breaking through the clouds? Or something like an eclipse?

Challenge: The assumption in this verse is that people will choose the light. How come so many choose darkness?

Scripture: Isaiah 40:1-20

Day 2: Isaiah 60:2

For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you.

The darkness is the attitude that power comes through force of arms. When Isaiah was writing, a nation or a person was admired by how well they could force their will on others. The ability to force your will on another nation or person was done by the force of arms. It was done by individuals by accumulating wealth and enslaving others. The Lord is not seen in such an environment. The glory of the Lord is seen where life grows, not where fear thrives.

Question: How can we push back the darkness?

Challenge: How does the glory of the Lord appear to you?

Scripture: Isaiah 40:21-31

Day 3: Isaiah 60:3

Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

The Persian empire was gaining new territory at a great rate when this was written. The world's eyes were to be turned their direction because they were the mightiest force in that region. Isaiah is saying in the midst of the current reality that in fact, the light of God and God's people will draw nations to it, not the power of Persia. This is the same message in Revelation in regards to the Roman Empire and the Church. Even though the Romans at the moment were all powerful, still the Church would one day draw more people to its light than the city of Rome.

Question: What is the difference between being a good example and a light?

Challenge: At times in our nation's history we have been held up as a light to the world. Is it possible for us to be light to the nations?

Scripture: Isaiah 41:1-20

Day 4: Isaiah 60:4

Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms.

In this verse Isaiah is asking for us to look and see that there are ones who are coming to God. In the midst of a world where evil seems to be everywhere we need to see that not everybody has given themselves up to evil. Isaiah is asking us (as Jesus did) to look about us and recognize the footprints of God. We do not see God because we have expectations of how God should appear and what is godly. One of the big challenges we have in our modern world is to recognize where and how God is being revealed.

Question: Does God work the same way in the first century as today?

Challenge: How do you see God being revealed in your daily life?

Scripture: Isaiah 66:6-24

Day 5: Isaiah 60:5

Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you.

When one nation conquered another the loser had to pay tribute to the winner. This tribute or tax was collected each year and was used to keep the victor's pockets full. The notion of the weaker having gifts brought to them was nonsense to the culture in the ancient world. The victor got the prize, not the second place person. The wealth of nations comes to Zion because of the willingness of those giving. Gifts are given to God out of love and gratitude not because we feel guilty or are trying to pay God back.

Question: Are taxes fair? What are you willing to pay taxes for?

Challenge: How do you feel about second or third place?

Scripture: Isaiah 60:11-22

Day 6: Isaiah 60:6

A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord.

Gold and Frankincense are royal gifts. Not only gifts of a practical nature will come to Zion but gifts that acknowledge God as King. When we give a gift to God we acknowledge that God is King. We give not only out of gratitude but out of a sense that the one who rules can use our money well. It is more difficult to acknowledge God as ruler over our finances than any other aspect of our life.

Question: Why did our writer pick camels as an example of wealth?

Challenge: How did you divide up your gift giving this year? Did God get much of a Christmas?

Scripture: Matthew 2:2-16

Marks

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of Discipleship

January 14, 2018

Day 1: Matthew 3:11-12

'I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I am coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing-floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.'

John's baptism was a call for people to repent. Repentance is a change of mind and a change in behavior. It means "turn around" - stop going in the direction you are going because that direction will end in your destruction. John's baptism was a sign of the coming judgment. The one coming with "fire" brings the judgment itself. The judgment would purify the righteous and burn up the unrighteous. Here at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, John's call to worship is not a cheery "good morning," but a cry - "Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand!"

Question: Why does John believe he is not worthy to carry "His" sandals?

Challenge: Why do you think we use water in our baptism services?

Scripture: Mark 1:1-11

Day 2: Matthew 3:13

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him.

Jesus begins His public ministry by going to see John where he was baptizing at the Jordan River. John will be the one to announce to the world that the savior has come to call all of humanity to Him. It is fitting that Jesus should go to see John for John had been telling people that the time had come for the people to repent so that they might "see" the Messiah. John baptized in the Jordan near the place where the people of Israel crossed the Jordan centuries ago to take possession of the Promised Land. They had to go through the Jordan to reach the Promised Land and John is calling them back to the Jordan so that they can once again go to the Promised Land.

Question: How old do you think Jesus was when he was baptized?

Challenge: In the United Methodist church we baptize in one of three ways: sprinkling (a small amount of water), pouring (a larger amount poured on the head), or immersion (the whole person going under the water). If you were being baptized which one would you want?

Scripture: Luke 3:2-23

Day 3: Matthew 3:14

John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?'

John recognizes that Jesus does not need to repent and does not need to go into the water. John sees before anyone else that Jesus comes from God. John's question allows Jesus to state that He is following God's will.

Question: From what you have been reading in the scripture section above, who needed to be baptized?

Challenge: Think back on a baptism service you have been to - what was the most meaningful part?

Scripture: John 1:19-37

Day 4: Matthew 3:15

But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he consented.

Righteous here means, doing the revealed will of God. Fulfill means to simply perform. Both John and Jesus are linked in carrying out God's plan of salvation for the world. God's plan includes the baptism of Jesus. The Gospel does not get into what was the motive behind the act or what was on the mind of either participant. The key is that they carry out God's commands and that they are obedient to God's command. In the Gospels, as important as the people involved are (and we do not get much more important than Jesus), all their actions point to their obedience to God's commands. The Creator, not the creature, is important.

Question: How do you feel about the concept of obedience?

Challenge: How do you see yourself being obedient to God's will?

Scripture: Acts 2:24-32

Day 5: Matthew 3:16

And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.

The image of the dove is found at some critical moments in the Bible. At creation the Spirit of God (many times depicted as a dove) went across the chaotic waters (Genesis 1:2). The dove flew out from the ark across the dangerous water (Genesis 8:8) and brought back an olive branch. In both of these events the dove is a sign of the coming of a new creation. The appearance of the dove in the midst of chaos is the sign that God is creating order out of chaos. The appearance of the dove in Matthew is the sign that the new kingdom has come. Out of the chaos in the world a new creation is emerging.

Question: Why a dove?

Challenge: When do you think of water as soothing, dangerous, or comforting?

Scripture: Romans 6

Day 6: Matthew 3:17

And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved with whom I am well pleased.'

The term "Beloved" is used in Isaiah 42:1 (in Isaiah it is translated 'servant'). Matthew has now completed his introduction of Jesus. He has shown his lineage and divine birth in chapters 1 and 2, now he shows the complete picture of Jesus as the Son of God and the suffering servant. At His baptism Jesus is acknowledged to the world that He is the Son of God and begins His public ministry. In our baptism we are declared publicly to be God's children and to be part of a royal priesthood which proclaims Jesus as Lord. In our baptism we begin our public ministry.

Question: Why was God pleased with Jesus?

Challenge: Do you feel a sense of calling by your baptism? And called to do what?

Scripture: Isaiah 42:1-10, Psalm 2:7

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January 21, 2018

Day 1: Ruth 1:1-2

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there.

One of the ironies of this story is that the name Bethlehem means “house of bread.” The region around Bethlehem must have been in a real desperate state for the family to leave their land. Many scholars believe that the account of Ruth takes place at the end of the time of the Judges. By the end of Judges Israel is in a state of chaos and even the last of the judges are less than honorable. It is a biblical principle that if the people are fallen away from God then even the land will suffer. To the ears of Israelites, Moab would represent evil and a place of death and destruction. Yet Elimelech is so desperate that he takes his family to that place.

Question: Look at an ancient map and see how far it was from Bethlehem to the country of Moab. How do you think they traveled?

Challenge: What would it take for you to pick up your family and move?

Scripture: Ruth 1

Day 2: Ruth 1:3-6

But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives; the name of one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. When they had lived there for about ten years, both Mahlon and Chilion also died, so that the woman was left without her two sons or her husband. Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the Lord had had consideration for his people and given them food.

What Naomi heard was that the drought around Bethlehem had ended and the land was once again plentiful. The family had migrated to Moab to find life but instead their hopes for the future were dashed. Naomi followed her husband into what she thought was a new life. As it turned out it was the end of her future. Now she goes back without any thought of a future for herself or family.

Question: What do you think Elimelech did for a living in Moab? Did he hire out for farming or have a trade or what do you think he did? How about the sons - what did they do for a living?

Challenge: Think about a time you traveled to find a future? What happened?

Scripture: Ruth 2

Day 3: Ruth 1:8-10

But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, ‘Go back each of you to your mother’s house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The Lord grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband.’ Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud. They said to her, ‘No, we will return with you to your people.

Going back to their “mother’s house” is equivalent to saying “you are young enough - go and look for new husbands and a new future.” Naomi believes that she will have no husband, no children and no future, so the girls should not go with her. Both of the girls have been very kind to Naomi.

Question: Why did Naomi tell the girls to go to their mother’s house and not their father’s?

Challenge: What was the kindness the girls showed Naomi?

Scripture: Ruth 3

Day 4: Ruth 1:11-13

But Naomi said, ‘Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the Lord has turned against me.’

Naomi has reason on her side. In those days your future was in your children. If there were not male children the line would die out and be forgotten.

Question: Why did she think the Lord had turned against her? Maybe it was just circumstances or bad luck.

Challenge: Do you ever worry that your family line will die out?

Scripture: Ruth 4

Day 5: Ruth 1:14-15

Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. So she said, ‘See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.

Naomi is indeed in bad shape and has no hope. She advises the girls to go back to their own gods because she doubts her God will be of any help.

Question: It is speculation - but why do you think Ruth wants to follow Naomi?

Challenge: What could you say to or do for Naomi to give her some hope?

Scripture: Jonah 1 and 2

Day 6: Ruth 1:16-18

But Ruth said, ‘Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people and your God my God. Where you die, I will die— there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!’ When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

Ruth’s speech shows a quality of God that humans can display in a lesser form. It is love and loyalty above what is normal or expected. Ruth is not swayed by Naomi’s sadness but is willing to go and seek a future in a foreign land with people who most likely will not receive her well. Ruth displays faith. We, as followers of Christ, put our future in the hand of the one we know as Jesus, the Lord.

Question: Do you think that Ruth has taken on the Jewish faith?

Challenge: What would make it hard for people to be followers of Jesus?

Scripture: Jonah 3-4

of Discipleship

January 28, 2018

Day 1: I Samuel 17:32

³²David said to Saul, 'Let no one's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine.

The "him" in this verse is Goliath of Gath. A very large man and champion of the Philistines. David is a young man about 12-14 and small. David will go and fight because he knows that God is with him no matter how the battle turns out. He has confidence (not arrogance) that God will bring a victory even if he falls in battle because he totally trusts God

Question: Why was David willing to fight Goliath?

Challenge: Do some research to see how big Goliath was and what he might have looked like.

Scripture: I Samuel 16:1-13

Day 2: I Samuel 17:33

³³Saul said to David, 'You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are just a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth.'

Saul has had a number of victories over the Philistines and the army has fought well. It maybe that it was time to remind Saul and the army just who was winning the victories. It was God who gave them the strength and the will to fight and win. Without the confidence that God is with you a person will rely on their own strength and soon find themselves exhausted. Goliath was a problem they could not solve by usual means so it was natural for Saul to doubt David.

Question: Why did David use stones and why 5?

Challenge: Make a list of things you can do yourself without Gods help.

Scripture: I Samuel 16.14-23

Day 3: I Samuel 17:37

³⁷David said, 'The LORD, who! saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine.' So Saul said to David, 'Go, and may the LORD be with you.

Notice that David does not go into this fight without knowledge of how God has been with him in the past. His early training in the use of a sling on predators that threatened his flock is used in his belief that he can overcome Goliath. God will give us what we need to deal with whatever comes up in life if we ask.

Question: Do you think Saul believed David was crazy or did He come to believe that this boy could do it.

Challenge: Think of 5 experiences that have helped you in your life

Scripture: I Samuel 17:1-30

Day 4: I Samuel 17:44

⁴⁴The Philistine said to David, 'Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the field.

What would have happened if Goliath decided to leave the field after he saw a boy coming against him? I don't think it would have been possible for him to leave because he was trained from a little boy to fight and kill. When we teach children to hate tand to see others as non-persons we make it almost impossible for them to see God's actions.

Question: Why wouldn't Goliath just knock David out or wound him?

Challenge: Think for a bit about your prejudices and where you got them?

Scripture: I Samuel 17:50-58

Day 5: I Samuel 17:45

⁴⁵But David said to the Philistine, 'You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. When the Philistine drew nearer to meet David, David ran quickly towards the battle line to meet the Philistine.

We all know how this story ends but there are times when spear and Javelin have won out over stones. When we battle against evil in Jesus's name we will win but not necessarily in the way David won. We need to head Jesus' words to be wise as serpents and gentle as doves. David was not fighting against a man named Goliath but the evil he represented.

Question: Does any army who fights in the name of the Lord win?

Challenge: Can you think of some David & Goliath stories now.

Scripture: I Samuel 18:1-8

Day 6: I Samuel 17:49

⁴⁹David put his hand in his bag, took out a stone, slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground

David uses 1 stone to slay Goliath but he picked up 5. He believed that God would aid him but he did know exactly how that aid would come. He knows he was good a slinging but this was a big guy maybe it would take more than one stone. God always leaves out some of the details of Gods plan so it is fine if we over prepare-it is not a sign we lack faith.

Question: Why did the Philistines give up after Goliath was down?

Challenge: You have 5 stones to knock out evil what are they?

Scripture: Psalm 3