

January 22, 2023
Third Sunday after Pentecost – The Sanctity of Human Life Sunday
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Isaiah 9:1-4 (Matthew 4:12-25)

IN CHRIST WE HAVE A GREAT LIGHT

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Our text for meditation today comes from the prophesy of Isaiah, the 9th chapter, which you heard read earlier.

When going from *darkness* to *light*, the *darkness* makes the *light* seem really bright. The *darker* the room and the longer stay in the *darkness*, the brighter the *light* seems to be when it is turned on. In the Bible the words *light* and *darkness* are often used in metaphorical ways to describe good and evil, truth and falsehood, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the devil, even life and death. In our Old Testament reading this morning Isaiah writes:

"2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone." (Isaiah 9:2; cf: (Matthew 4:16)

When Isaiah says: *"The people walked in darkness..."* he is not saying they went for a stroll in the middle of the night. No. God's people were dwelling in the *darkness* of mind and spirit, living outside of God's will and salvation. They had rejected the God of their fathers who lead them out of gloom of bondage in Egypt. They turned their backs on Him and sought out the *darkened* wisdom of mediums and wizards.

Because His people had rejected Him, God used the Assyrian army to punish His people, whittling them down to a remnant of what they had been. They are left to dwell in hopelessness and despair, and in the gloom of anguish. (cf: Isaiah 8:1–22) But through Isaiah, God comforts His people in their *darkness* by pointing them to the forgiveness He has for all who repent and return to Him. (cf: Isaiah 9:1)

Perhaps you know what it is like to live in *darkness* and gloom, carrying the guilt and shame of your past sins. The popular cliché says that *"time heals all wounds."* Forgive and forget. Get on with your life. Sometimes it is easier to forgive and forget the sins of others than it is with your own. Especially when it comes to the so-called *"big"* sins.

It is easy to forget how many times you have been unjustly angry with your neighbor or the times you bent the truth and told a little white lie. But sins like divorce, abuse, or adultery – or the mistakes you made in raising your children can leave you in the *darkness* of misery and

depression – even when you know they have been forgiven by God and have been thrown away as far as the east is from the west. (cf: Psalm 103:12)

Today, we observe the ***Sanctity of Human Life Sunday*** when we are reminded of the other so-called “***big***” sins. Sins of abortion, gender reassignment, and assisted suicide. The devil has done a good job of making these topics divisive political footballs. But the fact remains, God has the first and last word on all life issues. He is the Author of life. (cf: Acts 3:15) No one is conceived apart from His will. No one has autonomous authority over their own body because Christ has redeemed every life with His holy precious blood and His innocent suffering and death. (cf: 1 Corinthians 6:20)

If you want to really understand the burden of past sin, if you want to get some idea of what it is like to live in the ***darkness*** of the mind and spirit, hopelessness and despair, talk to someone who has seen the ***light*** of truth after having been involved in one way or another in making a decision to violate the sanctity of a human life created by God.

For many, it is difficult to imagine the ***darkness*** of carrying such a burden. For others, they do not have to imagine because it is the exact ***darkness*** in which they live and the burden they carry. If this ***darkness*** is your ***darkness*** you live in and it is the burden you carry, your heavenly Father has comfort, good news, and joy for you and all who have been robbed of the joy of their salvation by the burden of a past sin.

But before we get to that good news, what about those of you who rarely feel the burden and guilt of your sin? Many times, the lack of guilt and contrition is a sign of another problem. You and I neither acknowledge the seriousness of our own sinfulness nor grasp enormity of God’s wrath against sin. It was not the sin of idolatry or the sin of consulting mediums and wizards that brought God’s wrath upon His people. ***It was sin.*** It is not the sin of adultery or the sin of abuse or the sin of abortion or assisted suicide that brings God’s wrath upon you and me. ***It is sin.*** It is not the “size” of the sin that breaks your relationship with God. ***It is sin*** – sin both great and small.

Because of the sin handed down through the generations from Adam and Eve, you and I and all mankind deserve the judgment God pronounces on His people just prior to our text where He says:

“... they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness.” (Isaiah 8:22)

It is not pleasant to acknowledge what you and I deserve because of our sins. It is not pleasant, but it is necessary. Remember, it is the ***darkness*** that makes the ***light*** so bright. The joy of forgiveness increases when we acknowledge the depth of the ***darkness*** of our sin. And that is the Good News that we hear in our Old Testament text and the rest of the ninth chapter of Isaiah’s prophesy.

God’s people deserved ***darkness***, distress, and gloom, but through Isaiah the Lord God says:
“¹ But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the

latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations." (Isaiah 9:1)

God's people, who were humbled in the *darkness* of the past, are going to be honored and made glorious. God promised them a bright and joyful future. In today's Gospel, we hear Isaiah's prophesy explicitly fulfilled in Christ Jesus. St Matthew writes:

"¹³ And leaving Nazareth [Jesus] went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴ so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled." (Matthew 4:13–14)

In spite of the guilt and shame of the past, God would forgive His people and promised them joy and honor in the future through Christ Jesus. And you have the same promise. The joy of forgiveness comes not only from realizing how much God *has* forgiven you but also from anticipating the honor and glory that *await* you because you are forgiven. St Paul says:

"¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal." (2 Corinthians 4:17–18)

In spite of your past, in spite of your troubles, or the burden of your past sins, there is a bright and joyful future awaiting in eternity for all who believe. It will be so joyful that it will make all your troubles and burdens seem light and momentary. But how can you be sure of the forgiveness that promises this future joy? You can be sure because forgiveness does not depend upon the size of your sin or the number of your sins. Forgiveness depends upon the size of Jesus' sacrifice on your behalf. He gave all that He had, right down to His very body and blood.

Forgiveness comes through faith in the One who left the glory of heaven, humiliating Himself, taking on human flesh and walking in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali in the person of Jesus. He walked the roads of Galilee and beyond proclaiming a message of repentance for the forgiveness of sin. (cf: Matthew 4:17) He walked and stumbled and bled along the path to Mt Calvary so that you might have a place to turn when you are burdened with the sorrow of your sins – both big and small – turn and cling to Jesus' blood and righteousness.

The Father thrust Jesus into utter *darkness* and forsook Him to the *darkness* and wrath you and I deserve because of our sin. God then accepted His sacrifice and raised Him from the dead assuring us that the price has been paid for our forgiveness. In Baptism God placed His seal on you, giving you the gift of faith and Holy Spirit as a guarantee of what is to come. (cf: 2 Corinthians 1:22) You have the promise of God's forgiveness. It is your guarantee of a bright and joyful future with God in Heaven.

But enough about the future. What about right now? The feeling of guilt and the burden of sin do not necessarily go away because you know you are one day going to heaven. And this is especially true of past sins dealing with decisions to violate the sanctity of a human life created by God, such as the sins of abortion, gender reassignment, and assisted suicide. Even though you know you are forgiven, it is hard to forget, hard to get out from under the burden.

It is instructive to notice that beginning at verse 2 of our Old Testament text, the words of the prophet are spoken in the past tense, as if they have already happened. Isaiah says:

*"**2** The people who walked in darkness **have** seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them **has** light shone."* (Isaiah 9:2)

In verse 4, he speaks as if the yoke and burden of their oppressors has already been shattered. But the Assyrians who were oppressing them will not be defeated until chapter 37. The news of that yoke being shattered is so certain that it is as if they are already walking in the joyful **light** of that victory.

The certainty of your forgiveness is not just something that will give you joy in the future. It is your joy right now. You, who used to walk in the **darkness** of sin, now walk in the **light** of this joy. The certainty of forgiveness brings with it a constant **light** of joy. It is constant because it does not depend upon you. This joy is not subjective. It does not depend upon you feeling happy or feeling forgiven. It is a joy you have because you know that in spite of how you feel, in spite of how things may seem, God's forgiveness is as certain as Assyria's defeat was in our text. The burden of sin, its guilt and shame, has been shattered like the yoke of Israel's oppressors. Jesus not only took the punishment for your sin but its shame as well. Every day of your life you walk in that forgiveness. When you stumble, you stumble in that forgiveness. When you fall, you fall in that forgiveness. You have God's promises in your Baptism. He will not abandon you or withdraw His forgiveness just because you are having a bad day.

The sins of your past can make life seem **dark** and gloomy. That is not all bad. It is good to recognize the seriousness of sin and what you and I deserve. It increases the joy of forgiveness. It causes you to flee from sin and unrighteousness and cling to Jesus. In spite of your past, God has promised His people a bright and joyful future. Your joy is increased because forgiveness assures that there is an eternal glory that awaits you in heaven. In the meantime, your joy is increased every day because you walk in the certainty of God's forgiveness in Christ Jesus who is the **light** of the world shining **light** into the **darkness** and the **darkness** has not overcome it. (cf: John 1:5)

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.