New Light in a Dark World, Advent part two. (Isaiah 8:13-15, 19-22)

1. Last week, we read Isaiah 9:2. “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in a land of deep darkness, a light has dawned.” I absolutely love that passage. We immediately connected it with the first chapter of the Gospel of John because he took that poetic metaphor and ran with it, using the light vs. darkness motif as his guiding theme through his book on the life of Jesus.

2. But Isaiah did not stop where we stopped last week. If you go back into chapter 8, you run across verses 19 and 20 where, in contrast with those who see the light, you find necromancers, mediums, and magicians “distressed and hungry, they will roam through the land…They will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom.”

3. Note: the light is there. It has dawned. But these people are roaming the earth looking for light and finding only “darkness and fearful gloom.” Why? Notice the phrase in that passage: “looking toward the earth.” They were looking to the experts, spiritual leaders, scholars and cultural leaders for the solutions to their problems.

4. They admit that they are in darkness, but they say “just a little more government help,” “just a little more wisdom from our televisions or Vaclaor a better psychology” and we will be fine.

5. The old country song spoke of “looking for love in all the wrong places.” Humans have a history of that, but they have an even greater tendency to look for light in all the wrong places. Even in the Christmas season, you will hear countless ads or pundits declare that we can find peace in ourselves or in buying the right gifts for others, or receiving those gifts.

6. As if technology, innovation, government, and tribalism can bring us light. As if our own efforts, looking toward the earth, can bring us unity and peace on earth, goodwill toward men.

7. We have to ask…how has that worked out for you so far?

8. Vaclav Havel, the first president of the Czech Republic, is rightly admired as the leader who brought that republic out of the darkness of communism and dictatorship. However, he knew that was not enough to bring light to his people. He said, “Pursuit of the good life will not help humanity save itself, nor is democracy alone enough. A turning to and seeking of God is needed. The human race constantly forgets that he is not God.”

9. I admit that it baffles me that we think that we, by our collective efforts, can bring unity and peace into the world at large and into our lives as individuals. Why? Look deeply into your own heart and answer the question. If you are being honest with yourself and allow yourself some time of deep introspection, you will be forced to admit that you are flawed, deeply flawed. There are aspects of your thoughts, your character, and your actions that need to be better and, yet, are not despite any efforts you may have made to better yourself.

10. You are not alone. Every person on earth is flawed, broken, and unable to fix themselves. Why, then, do we believe that another person can fix us, or a new government can fix us, or that a new law, a new exercise, a new drug, a New Year’s resolution can fix us?

11. Many stop the introspection and live in denial, pronouncing themselves just fine. Most can’t do that for long so they either have to focus on their brokenness, focus on Jesus, the true light, or they take the third path: focus on the faults and evils of others. THAT is social media. THAT is the world of political and social pundits. THAT is what we pump into our living rooms and through our earbuds…and then we wonder why are have no peace, no unity.

12. If you turn to science for the answer – and I adore and appreciate science – you will left even more in the darkness. For science cannot give you the why’s of life or the reason to live. It cannot measure your value and it cannot give you meaning past a life that is nasty, brutish and short only to die and be forgotten and all that you were disappear into dust.

13. The late Timothy Keller put it this way and I can find no way to improve his words so I will just quote them: “Christmas, therefore, is the most unsentimental, realistic way of looking at life. It does not say,

‘Cheer up! If we all pull together we can make the world a better place.’ The Bible never counsels indifference to the forces of darkness, only resistance, but it supports no illusions that we can defeat them ourselves. Christianity does not agree with the optimistic thinkers who say ‘we can fix things if we try hard enough’ nor does it agree with the pessimists who see only a dystopian future. The message of Christianity is, instead, ‘Things really are this bad, and we can’t heal or save ourselves. Things really are this dark – nevertheless, there is hope.”

14. Where does that hope come from? From the light that came from beyond the world and arrived to the chorus of angels in Bethlehem of Judea. As John says in John 8:12, Jesus IS the light.

15. Why does this light heal our flaws and brokenness? Because when we come to the light, we come back to where we belong, back to before the sin in the Garden of Eden. We who were made in the image of God – and that is all of you – are finally back in the hands of whom scripture says “we live and move and have our being.” (Acts 17:28) Colossians says that, in him, all things consist and hold together.

16. We were designed from the ground up (literally) to be with Jesus, to be with the light.

17. That light brings us information just as light does in the natural world. In a recent rainstorm, I was appalled to see several cars without their lights on. It was dark, rainy, and the spray from cars and trucks filled the air and made visibility difficult…and they didn’t have their lights on. We all know how dangerous that is and I assume they didn’t realize they weren’t on for who would drive like that on purpose?

18. Want to read a book? NEED to read something so that you can fix something broken in your house or car, or pass a test, or understand an issue that is facing you? You need light. 1st John 1:5-6 tells us that God is the source of all truth and truth can only be revealed by the light. We even refer to learning something as “the lights came on” and illustrate someone having an idea by drawing a light bulb above them on the comics page.

19. Those who go without light for long periods of time such as those living near the poles are often profoundly affected by the lack of sunlight. We know, of course, that there are serious medical conditions that result from a lack of vitamin D, the best source of which is sunlight. But, something even more common is Seasonal Affective Disorder. Appropriately known as SAD, this can cripple us psychologically making it difficult to do mental tasks and easier to slide into depression.

20. We need light. We need the sun. We need to SEE.

21. And what happens when we see? Everything! Yes, we see, in stark relief, our own faults and brokenness but, instead of leading us to despair, it gives birth to a different spirit within us, one that understands that other people are hurting, too. We judge less. We strike out against others far less. We expect perfection less and even expect agreement less.

22. We also find our value because the light does not just point out our flaws, it fills them in with the love of God and brings us meaning and hope. We are not just a collision of stardust arranged by accident into a human being who will live and die and be forgotten by the universe, meaningless and unmissed. No, we are eternal beings, handcrafted by the Light who is the source of all life and holds all life together. We will never be forgotten and, while, on earth, our names will be lost in the future, we will all remember each other on Reunion Day, the Day of Judgment.

23. He does not deny our faults and sins – he takes them and removes them. Isaiah 53.

24. Yes, there are presents at Christmas for most of us. But the greatest gift has been given to us already…if we are willing to look away from the world for the solutions to our hurt and pain and look up to the Lord of Light who came that blessed night in Bethlehem of Judea.