

*First Sunday in Advent*  
November 28, 2010  
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Isaiah 2:1-5

*This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem: In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the LORD. (NIV)*

Darkness can do funny things to cause a person fear and anxiety. Ever remember being in a dark, frightening place where dangers seem to be lurking out of sight, in the shadows, behind any corner. I do. If you can picture this, my childhood home was at the bottom of a big hill with our church way up top and the church cemetery on the other side. Every day in order to get to school on the bottom of the other side of this hill I had to walk up the hill then down the big hill through the cemetery. I was never afraid of the walk one bit until the first time I went by myself at night. In the dark, every tree and every gravestone seemed like a danger where a person could be lurking ready to jump out at me. Every shadow threatened me and I walked, even ran, at a much quicker pace than normal to get through the cemetery and back to the safety of my home. The change between walking there in the dark than in the light was literally a day and night difference.

Today, we are reminded of a darkness even more scary and frightening - the darkness of sin - a spiritual darkness. More threatening is the darkness of unbelief which leads to the outer darkness of hell. This is the worst kind of darkness. This morning as we recognize this darkness all around may we consider how: **Dark Times Call for a Walk in the Light!**

Isaiah lived during some dark times for Israel. The once powerful kingdom had split in two and enemy forces were threatening to destroy them. Inside the nation there was greed and selfishness, so much so that courts were corrupt and people cared more about money and possessions than looking out for the poor and needy. Worst of all was the spiritual darkness. Oh, the priests and people were still doing the sacrifices and going through the religious motions, but most of the people had hearts that were far from God. They did not care to hear God's Word and looked the other way when it came to God's commands. Read Isaiah and quickly you see that God is not pleased with Israel, with Judah and Jerusalem. He will send judgment and punish these unfaithful people with destruction and captivity and slavery. These were dark times about to get even darker.

Like Israel isn't the same true for us that we are walking in dark times? The other night I turned on the news for about two minutes, listened to a couple awful stories, and had to turn it. The darkness of sin is frightening at times. There is open rebellion against

God and His Word and people everywhere are disobeying God's commands. These are dark times indeed. Even within the visible church there is darkness, far too many examples to list - of false doctrines and corrupt practices. There are people in our day worshipping God with their lips but their hearts are far from Him. Don't let us ever think for a minute that we don't get caught up in the darkness! We like to run with the world after all the sinful desires of our own hearts. We too at times put God' Word behind us and move on in the darkness of our sins. And God has also set a day for judgment for us and the Son of Man will come on a day we do not expect.

So what should we do? Are we to just mope around in the dark? Is there no hope in this dark world of sin? Thankfully, God gave to Isaiah more than just words of judgment for the people of Israel, for us. There is a light in the darkness. God gives some good news in His promises. In fact, much of this promise before us is repeated again in Micah so it is a message the Lord wants to emphasize. ***"This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem: In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it."***

The Lord shows Isaiah He will establish something great. The Lord will establish something through Judah and in Jerusalem. He will establish this in the last days - the time between Christ's first coming and His second coming. He will establish ***"the mountain of the Lord's temple"*** that will be chief among all mountains and rise above the rest. People will come to it eagerly and in great numbers. If you battled the crowds for the best sales this last black Friday perhaps you can imagine this. The picture is literally that of streams flowing and running uphill to this place. People from all nations will come to this mountain. Do you have any idea now of what Isaiah is seeing? This is not the actual mountain in Jerusalem that the temple was built on - that was more of a hill. This temple above all others is the temple with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone. It is the kingdom that God established through the perfect life and innocent sufferings and death of His only Son. What is happening here is what Jesus once said of Himself: ***"I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself"*** (John 12). This is a picture of Christ's church - the kingdom above all others - the mustard seed that grew into the largest plant of all. This is the Holy Christian Church - the communion of saints - all those who have been called out of darkness into the wonderful light of faith in Christ Jesus.

Now these words start to make sense: ***"Many peoples will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.' The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem."*** This is why we come to church, isn't it? We come to hear God's Word. That why we encourage others to be here. This is the only place where sinners can find refuge - the only place where God's love and forgiveness can be found. We come to hear what God has to say. Here God teaches us and shows us the way. The word ***"law"*** that will go out from Zion is a word that means teaching or instruction and includes both the law and the gospel. Here at church God tells us about our sins and the need for Christ, but then God also tells us how Jesus meets our needs. It is the good news that Jesus died for our sins and rose again that draws people to this mountain. God's Word teaches us how we are saved and how the saved should live. God's Word is the light to guide us through the darkness.

There is another blessing mentioned specifically here. ***“They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.”*** Here in Christ’s Church we find peace. Across the street from the United Nations Building in New York, a stone wall on the United Nations Plaza quotes from Isaiah here: ***“They shall beat their swords into plowshares.”*** Is that what Isaiah is seeing? Is he talking about peace on earth between nations, the end of all physical wars? No, Jesus told Peter to put his sword away for a different reason for as Jesus told Pilate ***“if my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight.”*** Jesus came to bring peace all right, but a different peace - a peace that the world cannot bring.

The fulfillment of prophecies often have a “now” and “not yet” to them. That is true here as now we already have peace - the peace that Jesus’ first coming brought to us - the peace on earth and good will toward men we will soon hear the angels sing about once again as we celebrate Jesus’ birth. This is the peace of knowing our sins are forgiven, the peace we have with God, the peace we have through faith in Jesus that surpasses all understanding. This is the now. The not yet is the sure and certain hope that we will one day have peace unlike any other, peace from all our labors, peace because our enemies will no longer threaten us, peace that will come for all believers at Jesus’ second coming, peace that is found only in heaven.

What a difference it makes to walk in the light! Think of Simeon who held the baby Jesus in his arms and praised God saying: ***“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel”*** (Luke 2). Think of Jesus who declared: ***“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life”*** (John 8). Think of Jesus sending out the apostle Paul saying: ***“I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me”***(Acts 26).

Now think of your own mission. God has made you lights in this dark world. Think of how many people around you are still walking in the dark, the worst kind of darkness. In these dark times, people are turning to all kinds of wrong places to try and find comfort and peace and true happiness. But we know those blessing can’t be found under a tree, or dressed up with pretty wrappings and bows; they can’t be found in family cheer, or lighted and decorated houses. Instead, let us continue to say ***“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD.”*** ***“Come to church with me to hear what God has to say. Come hear about a Savior, one who bled and died on a cross to bring you peace. Hear of a Savior who on a cross faced the darkness of God’s wrath, and paid for the darkness of our sin, so we could walk in the light of the Lord - in His forgiveness and love.”*** Tell all the good news that with Jesus at your side, leading the way, there is nothing to fear. ***“Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the LORD.”*** It is truly a night and day difference! Amen.