

*The Third Sunday after Epiphany*  
January 26, 2014  
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Isaiah 8:19-9:2

*When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn. Distressed and hungry, they will roam through the land; when they are famished, they will become enraged and, looking upward, will curse their king and their God. Then they will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness...Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan - - The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. (NIV)*

“*You have questions, we have answers.*” Perhaps you remember this as the slogan advertisement for Radio Shack. It is a clever slogan because we all want answers. Where do we go for answers? Technology has made that pretty simple. One click on a computer or one touch of an ipod or ipad and instantly we find more information than we could have ever dreamed of having years ago. I heard someone make the comment recently that our phones are now smarter than us. Yes, if you have questions you can find answers. But what if you have questions about the really important things in life? Then a click of a computer only brings up more questions. What if you have some critical concerns about your future? That is something that can’t be figured out in one touch of an ipod or ipad. What if you have essential questions about death? Then even if it is true that our phones are smarter than us, there is no phone smart enough to deal with death.

Thankfully, we are not left in the dark. We have been given all the information we need. I pray you take comfort and find hope this morning in this terrific truth: **You have questions - God has answers 1) in the light of His Word. 2) in the light of His Son.**

These words of Isaiah begin with a couple piercing questions. “*Should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living?*” Isaiah isn’t talking to heathen nations but to the people in Israel. The Israelites had some real concerns about their future. They were getting weaker and their enemies were getting stronger. Things looked dark and uncertain and they had some important questions. Instead of turning to God for answers they were consulting mediums and spiritists. They were trying to get answers from the dead to tell them what was going to happen to them. In other parts of Isaiah we read about people looking to the stars to find answers. In chapter 47 Isaiah writes: “*All the counsel you have received has only worn you out! Let your astrologers come forward, those stargazers who make predictions month by month, let them save you from what is coming upon you...they cannot even save themselves.*”

Are people still looking in places like these for answers today? Absolutely! I don’t know if horoscopes are still as popular as they once were but they are still readily available. So too are mediums and fortune tellers and tarot card readers and psychics and many other

avenues. There are groups and cults forming claiming to have the answers all the way from Atheism to Zen – with things such as Scientology and many others in between. Listen to how Isaiah describes all those searching for answers in all these wrong places: “***Distressed and hungry, they will roam through the land; when they are famished, they will become enraged and, looking upward, will curse their king and their God. Then they will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness.***” Not a pretty picture, is it?

Do we ever fall into the trap of consulting others when we should be inquiring of our God? Have we ever wasted time gobbling up the garbage of the world rather than feasting on the bread of life? Do you ever look at horoscopes – thinking it might be nice to get a little insight into the future? Do you search other places because you want some answers? Who do you think is behind all these things claiming to have the answers for you? It is Satan lurking. Why do you think the Lord says all these things are detestable to Him? It is because the Lord wants our trust and because our God alone holds our future in His hands. Those who search and search for answers apart from God will remain in the dark and will end up in outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

So where should the Israelites have been looking for answers? Where should we? Isaiah emphatically proclaims: “***To the law and to the testimony!***” Or today we might say: “***To the Bible!***” God had given the people of Israel His Word. Why were they looking elsewhere? They had questions. God had the answers. We have questions. God has the answers. They are right here in the light of His Word. We want to know why we have trouble and sickness and sadness. We want to understand why people die. It is all right here in His Word. We want to know how God feels about us, why we are here, how we got here, what purpose there is for our life, how we can be saved. Open up His Word. We want to know what will happen to this earth or where people go when they die. Only God has the answers for us in His Word. You want direction and guidance for your life. You have it for God’s Word is a lamp to our feet and a light for our path.

So where do we go for answers – not just for the little things but the things that really matter? Why would we go anywhere else? The Bible is the only absolutely true and reliable source. We have God’s Word on it! In fact, Isaiah warns: “***If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn.***” Only when it comes from God’s Word can we always say Amen to it. When someone speaks something that goes against what is in this Word we can say with certainty they are wrong – they have no light of dawn. What a blessing that God does not leave us in the dark for when we have questions God has answers in the light of His Word! The apostle Peter writes: “***And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you would do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place.***” (1)

Sadly, many in Israel, with wicked king Ahaz leading the way, paid no attention to God’s Word. They sought out mediums and spiritists. They did not inquire of their God. They remained in the darkness of sin and unbelief. And soon the Assyrians would be knocking on their door. The lands of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali are mentioned specifically here. These were the two northernmost tribes west and northwest of the Sea of Galilee. This area was vulnerable and became a doormat for invading armies. In fact, Assyria came and took these places and deported the people to Assyria. Then the king of Assyria settled the land with his own heathen people so that for a time this northern territory became known as “Galilee of the nations or the Gentiles.” But now Isaiah had some good

news for them. *Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan -- The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.*"

The Lord will honor this land. God will shine a great light in this place where there was once only darkness and death. We don't have to guess what God is talking about here! We read in our Gospel lesson from Matthew today exactly who this great light is here. Isaiah is talking about the coming Messiah. Jesus set up this area of Galilee as the home base for his earthly ministry. The Son of God spent much of His time right here preaching and teaching, healing and helping, calling people out of darkness into His wonderful light.

What about the land we live in today? Are we not living in a place filled with the darkness of sin and unbelief? Do not our own sins add to the darkness? Thank God He sent the answer for our sin in the light of His Son. How can sinners acquire the holiness needed to live with a God in whom there is no darkness at all? The answer is Jesus our righteousness. Jesus' perfect life provides sinners the holiness they need. How can we escape the wrath of God and the punishment our sins deserve? The answer is Jesus the atoning sacrifice for sin, not only for our sins but the sins of the whole world. The answer is found on the cross where Jesus suffered and died in our place. What will happen to me when I die and what will I find on the other side? The answer is Jesus the resurrection and the life. The answer is seen in the grave Jesus left behind. The answer is Jesus who will come again to take us into the heaven He prepared for us. The answer to all our important questions is Jesus. Indeed, *"the people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."*

You have questions. You have something much better than any answers you can find on your computer, ipad, or phone. You have a God who has the answers. He answers everything you need to know in the light of His Word. He answers by giving you everything you need in the light of His Son. I pray we go to both daily. If we do we have God's promise that we will never be left in the dark! Amen.