

## “Arise and Shine”

Isaiah 60:1-6

It is easier for some of us more than for others to believe a good word. Some of you can remember when Kelly Lane was surrounded by fields and cows. Imagine a prophet coming to city leaders in 1985 announcing, *Pflugerville will be blessed with retail stores and restaurants, 500 houses rolling over every hill, and developers filling councilperson's heads with dreams of brick and mortar.* I am sure if those words were spoken to city leaders 30 plus years ago, most of them would have been a bit incredulous.

Arise, shine; your light has come surely caused feelings of astonishment to a people who were left for dead among the peoples of the world. The thought other nations giving import to Israel was baffling. Gentiles honoring them, bringing them camels, gold and frankincense must have sounded like nonsense. The Hebrew people did not have a single reason to believe this good word from the prophet. It was more than difficult for this nation to comprehend God loves Israel and doesn't see them the way they see themselves, captives in the hands of another nation.

The words in chapter 60 are addressed to people who were carted far home. They have spent 70 years in forced Babylonian captivity. The Book of Isaiah sets those years in context. The first 40 chapters tell of how Israel will lose the glory of her land for trusting in her ways and not God. The second part, chapters 40-54, declare God will bring them home, restoring their fortunes. The third part, chapters 55-66, speak of the eldest captives coming home to a depressing place, where everything has changed. The nation is in ruins, there's nothing to build on; and they feel too old to try.

Understanding the context of the words arise and shine is key to appreciating this passage. Arise and shine, your light has come was spoken to people who felt all was lost and little remained to rebuild. The way these words travel into the 21<sup>st</sup> century is to consider they are addressed to places and people in who might question the efficacy of this claim because all is in ruins, there are few resources, and we feel aged and tired. Three current groups:

**Western Church:** We took the world by storm, transforming it from its pagan roots. Our missionary efforts had a global effect. In America, we tried to keep church and state separated, yet the church would eventually occupy a both comfortable and uncomfortable privileged place in the culture. That is a place the church no longer holds in all western nations.

We have struggled with our feelings of this loss that has impacted our relationship to schools, business and beyond. Both in North American and Europe people wonder how the Western church as a whole might arise and shine again?

**Local Church:** Our church has struggled over this last decade how to be the church in this growing community. We sit at ground zero among explosive progress around us and the whirlwinds of change can feel overwhelming. Even, this week, two key groups will meet, wondering what we should do to arise and shine the light of Christ into our community. There are so many different kinds of people in our city, and PfUMC has so limited resources to meet the wide array of needs our community while some of us feel older and tired. Can we arise and shine the light of Christ bright enough into our world?

**Personally:** Persons who have changed firms numerous times because of economic shifts are troubled, haunted by what they have yet to achieve in their career. Persons who have faced financial hardships because of medical or personal challenges wonder if they will ever rise and shine again. Persons who have experienced broke or underperforming relationship, wonder if they have missed their moment to arise and shine.

Prophets—not the kind that get rich on telling people what they want to hear—are real contrarians. Prophecy has a way of telling people who are on top that they'd better get a grip because the floor is about to fall out from under them. Also, it tells people who think the roof has fallen on them, they had better run for the oxygen because the air is thin where they are going. How can we ready ourselves to hear the contrarian words of the prophet?

**Admit the Loss:** We will arise and shine when we do basic grief work of admitting we feel down and out. This is not easy in our anesthetized culture that is reluctant to voice fear, anxiety, grief and other painful feelings we avoid. I am fine is perhaps the three most dangerous words in the English vocabulary. They convince us nothing has changed and causes us to act unwisely because we are masking the real heartache we feel. Grief work begins by letting go our denial and admitting the loss we have experienced.

Americanized death rituals prevent us from accepting our losses. We are too quick to celebrate a life rather than mourn the loss of life. So, we shy away from those who grieve deeply for we don't want to feel those deep and unfamiliar feelings. Paying heed to the dead and dying, such as stopping when we see a funeral procession doesn't just honor the deceased, it helps us attend to our own mortality. Sitting and listening to a

friend who is grieving helps us deal with our own aging and dying. We can't win all the time, (right Cowboy and Texan fans). There comes a time when we need to admit we have faced a deep loss, so we might hear the words arise and shine.

The ReWRYE workshop we will offer this spring will help persons honestly face the reality of a loss and its impact. Long before we can hear the words arise and shine in our hearts, we will need to admit the pain and sorrow we feel because of that which is no more in our lives.

**Accept the Good News:** The crux of the good news is God has such love for us that God has repeatedly delivered people from their captivity. First in Egypt, when they were a nobody. Next, in Babylon, when they had gone astray. Last, in Christ when all humanity was lost and could not see a way out from their self-imprisonment. This last time God employed a humble carpenter's son who became an itinerant rabbi among the least and lost, declaring, rise and shine your light has come.

God doesn't need our correct choices, youthful spirit, and good reputation to make something new out of our uncertain lives. The good news is God is already at work, shining light into the dark places of our lives. God has a thing for you and me and this church. God favors the least and the lost. We can accept the good news and take the next step.

**Act Now:** We are now ready to take action. Each of us has a mission and purpose in the world that can only be carried out by actual deeds that live into the reality that our light has come, and we can arise and shine. It is time to get up off the couch of idleness and walk into whatever degree of light God has provided. We act the part, even before we fully believe it ourselves.

What we are not doesn't matter. What we lack doesn't define us. Our day of feeling enslaved, assuming we have little to offer our world are over. We can stand tall, throw back our heads, stick out our chests, celebrating the goodness of that light that shines into our lives and eventually will shine through us into our world.

Church, do you believe our light has come and we are on precipice of arising and shining? We have a guiding vision, supported by a developing strategic plan that will unfold this Spring. One of the key elements of the vision and plan will involve our worship experiences. In order for us to walk into this new light, we will have to let go of some things that have passed, believe God can use what we have to offer, then taking action steps together. REPEAT.

We will arise and shine, not because we have it in us. We will arise and shine because we have God in and with us. So, *Arise and shine, PfUMC our light has come! Arise and shine each one of us, our light has come!*