

## **POINTS TO PONDER**

“<sup>1</sup>Arise, shine; for your light has come,  
and the beauty of God has risen upon/among/within/through you.”

— *Isaiah 60.1*

“Encouraging words remind us of who we are and were created to be. They seek to lift us up and have us remember our worth, dignity, and beauty when the world strips these qualities away from us.

Isaiah, writing during the exile, reminds the people that amidst their anxiety and despair that God’s light shines upon, among, within, and through us. (*Note: The beauty of Hebrew and Greek words, especially prepositions, is that they can signify multiple meanings. This multivalent nature of these ancient languages asks us to consider the varying truths and meanings of the words*). Because we were created with this goodness and light within us, made in the image of God, we need not wait for our circumstances to change before we can let that beauty to shine forth from us. It is there; waiting for us to recognize that it has not been defeated or taken away. It is like an ever-rising sun that overcomes the darkness of our lives.

Isaiah prods the people to intentionally and willfully arise; for they could just as easily remain seated or lying down through life. He tells them to shine in the midst of circumstances in which they are doubtful that they even can.

The Hebrew word translated as ‘upon’ by many translations can also mean ‘among,’ ‘within’ or ‘through’ – which supplies us with less hierarchical terminology, and implies that we don’t have to wait for God to act while we remain immobile. The latter three words better reflect the meaning of the incitements to have us to ‘rise’ and ‘shine’ – choices that are ours, and not merely an action performed upon us by another.

How can we best rise and shine in a world that needs the light that God has created us with, so that we can generously give of that light to others and the world as a whole?”

— *Rev. Bret S. Myers, 1/6-7/2023*

“<sup>2</sup>For darkness will cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples;  
but God will arise upon/among/within/through you,  
and God’s glory/honor/beauty will appear over/among/within/through you.”

— *Isaiah 60.2*

“Isaiah makes sure that his words of encouragement are not interpreted as pithy platitudes, or toxic optimism, that discounts the reality of the situation. The people are very familiar with the darkness that covers the earth and peoples. They have witnessed the violence, devastation, corruption, and injustice that permeates nearly every aspect of their existence.

Isaiah is not discounting or ignoring these realities, but reminds the people that as strong as these forces are in our lives, there is something still stronger...still more resilient and lasting. He, like us, recalls the stories of those who in the worst of situations found a way to let their own light shine. He remembers those who have been repeatedly knocked down only to arise again and again. And for even those who have individually perished, their spirit lives on in those of us who refuse to let that spirit of love, compassion, courage, resolve, hope, and faithfulness to die with them.

Beauty/honor is ever-present. But more importantly, it can be created where none seems to exist. This is the power of the sacred in our lives. And even in the darkest times of our lives, even there it can arise so that the light we receive, possess, and pass on cannot be extinguished.

Do we share Isaiah's faith that the light within us will overcome darkness all around us? Though we are covered at times in darkness, do we trust that the light present can overcome that darkness? How can we best encourage others to let their light shine?"

— Rev. Bret S. Myers, 1/6/2023

"<sup>3</sup>Nations will come to your light, and kings/rulers to the brightness of your dawn."

— Isaiah 60.3

"While often interpreted as an exclusive and even sanctimonious, claim that Israel is somehow above other nations because of their unique light, we need not take such a tribalistic view ourselves. Nor do we need to interpret that this was Isaiah's view either. Isaiah was perhaps more pluralistic and inclusive in his understanding of how we are to be God's people than most of us. He envisions peace, love, and equality for all peoples and creatures. He sees a world in which all things live in harmony with one another – something not possible so long as any of us sees ourselves as superior to any others.

With this more egalitarian worldview, we might better interpret Isaiah's words to imply that all nations will come to the light of truth and virtue that make us all as one. That light can be seen from all parts of the earth, just as can the sun. It matters not our particular vantage point, methods, rituals, or beliefs that helped us to see by that light; but rather it is the light itself that can be seen and lived by all peoples and creatures no matter where they live or what system of belief that has helped them to see the light. It is not Israel's light any more than it is America's, Iran's, Russia's, or North Korea's. The brightness of our dawn is not revealed by our uniquenesses from one another, but rather by the same intrinsic spirit by which we are all created and can access for ourselves. The light of love, epitomized by God, can be seen and enacted by any of us.

I suspect Isaiah, like Jesus, would agree that, properly understood, there will be no nations or kings when we all let the light of love live within and through us. Divisions and partitions are removed in the eyes of the enlightened, who come to see all people and all species as their siblings; equals in our God-given goodness. No longer will there be kings or rulers, for we will each respect one another as free beings who choose to live in harmony with one another. This is the brightness and brilliance that is the new dawn of a new Eden for the world.

Are we willing to trust in such a vision? Are we willing to work towards it, and put away the darkness that tells us it is not possible?"

— Rev. Bret S. Myers, 1/6/2023

"<sup>4</sup>Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons will come from far away, and your daughters will be carried on their nurses' arms."

— Isaiah 60.4

"Isaiah is speaking mytho-poetically to the people. If they 'literally' looked around, they would see the same awful conditions that they have suffered for years in exile. What has changed in actuality? 'Nothing,' they would likely say. But he is appealing not literally to their physical eyesight, but mytho-poetically to their spiritual insight.

Their eyes have been downcast, but in asking them to lift their eyes he is metaphorically telling them to look to their ideals and not their actual circumstances. In essence, he is saying: 'Look around' the world of your ideals, and not the world of your daily living. Don't think that 'the way it is' is 'the way it has to be.'

Again, 'sons' and 'daughters' are not literal, but figurative. In that we become siblings of all, our sons and daughters will be those who come even from far places or from ailing conditions to hear the healing and regenerative testimony that our faith speaks to them. When we live above our conditions, when we

envision a better world than the one we have, people will come to hear us. They are inspired by our indomitable faith.

Don't we all need those who will keep focus on our greatest ideals, rather than simply proclaiming what we see is what we must endure? Shouldn't we ourselves be such people for others?"

— Rev. Bret S. Myers, 1/6/2023

<sup>5</sup>"Then you will see and be radiant; your heart will thrill and rejoice..."

— *Isaiah 60.5ab*

"The transformation that takes place when we let the light of love shine within and through us changes our reality. We see the world differently. Our circumstances may not change, but our attitude towards those circumstances change. We see what is possible, not what is actual. We trust in a better world, and don't let the present world deform our faith. When we see, we don't see merely with our eyes, but with our souls. Our spirits are radiant with our faith in the possibilities of life. Our heart is overjoyed; not because of what we endure, but because of what we aspire to rise above.

How can our attitudes help us to live in accordance with our greatest virtues and values, even when we are brought low by the vicissitudes of daily life?"

— Rev. Bret S. Myers, 1/6-7/2023

<sup>17c</sup>I will appoint Peace as your overseer and Righteousness/Justice as your taskmaster.

— *Isaiah 60.17c*

"Isaiah uses linguistic imagery with which they are accustomed, but the implications of his words tell us that the people will no longer have human overseers or taskmasters – that form of oppression that they are so familiar with, as were their ancestors. If peace is the overseer, then there is no longer a hierarchy; people will learn to live as equals and treat each other as such. If righteousness (often synonymous with justice in Hebrew) is the taskmaster, then all oppression will cease, for righteousness follows the Golden Rule of treating others as oneself desires to be treated.

Can we imagine, like Isaiah, a world in which such equality, mutual respect, and care are the prevailing ethos of the entire society? Dare we try to live by such an ethic in a world which is not yet there? What if we changed our behaviors and lifestyles to accord with what we wanted the world to be instead of what we see it to be? How might that affect us, and others?"

— Rev. Bret S. Myers, 1/6/2023

<sup>18</sup>Violence will no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders; you will call your walls Salvation/Liberation, and your gates Praise/Rejoicing.

— *Isaiah 60.18*

"Everyone says they are for peace, but are we aware that peace requires an elimination of violence? For millennia, people have been swayed by the doublespeak of those who make war in the name of peace. What if we refused to go along with this ruse any longer? What if we demanded an end to violence of every kind as a requirement of our speaking about and professing the virtue of peace?

When no violence occurs, neither does devastation and destruction. In a world where we value no violence whatsoever, there is no need for walls or gates. In such a world, where peace abides between peoples and creation, salvation/liberation is the only wall that remains, and praise/rejoicing is the only gate that people encounter. In other words, no walls and no gates are needed at all. Like violence, they are extinguished, as they no longer have a use in a world where people love and care for one another as they do themselves. No barriers are to exist between us. What is mine is yours, and what is yours is mine; i.e., neither of us possess anything individually, but we all share all that there is for the benefit of one and all.

Are we willing to advocate and work for such a world? What things do we need to do in order to bring such a world to fruition?"

— *Rev. Bret S. Myers, 1/6/2023*

<sup>19</sup>The sun will no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness will the moon give light to you by night; but God will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory/honor/beauty. <sup>20</sup>Your sun will no more go down, or your moon withdraw itself; for God will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning will be ended.

— *Isaiah 60.19-20*

"Isaiah's highly mytho-poetic language has us to imagine realities we might think are impossible. He is not to be taken literally in saying that the sun will no longer shine, but rather he is proposing that as dependent as we are on the daily rising and setting of the sun, we are to place even more importance on the light of living in love with one another as God loves us.

Our love, the key attribute of God, is to be as routine as the rising and setting of the sun. Indeed, it is to be unceasing; never rising or setting, but always shining its fullest, as at the mid time of day. It is to be distributed as equitably to all as the sun shines on all peoples and lands; always and forever.

It is only with such abundant and continuous love that we can imagine a world in which there is no longer any mourning; where we all come to each other's aid when any hardship arises. Is this the kind of world you'd like to live in? What are you doing to help make that happen?"

— *Rev. Bret S. Myers, 1/6/2023*