

## Homilies for Lectionary Homiletics December 2010 – January 2011

### Pastoral Implications for Isaiah 9:1-4 on Third Sunday after the Epiphany

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### Isaiah Chapter 9

- 1 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; Upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone.
  - 2 You have brought them abundant joy and great rejoicing, As they rejoice before you as at the harvest, as men make merry when dividing spoils.
  - 3 For the yoke that burdened them, the pole on their shoulder, And the rod of their taskmaster you have smashed, as on the day of Midian.
  - 4 For every boot that tramped in battle, every cloak rolled in blood, will be burned as fuel for flames.
- New American Bible

Darkness and light are themes of the greatest love story ever lived and told – God’s love for us. In the beginning, there was the first darkness, the void, out of which God created the first light and everything in it and saw it was good. God’s love overflowed in creating a special relationship with Adam and Eve, with whom God walked in the garden of Eden, no greater image of deep love.

Then came the second darkness, more ominous. One of God’s creatures, lesser than God, Lucifer, the serpent, who was given freedom, chose to slink back into the darkness and not receive the light, and reject this relationship with God. The serpent tempted Adam and Eve, by cloaking the darkness as if it was light, telling them they would have God’s power and light if they ate the apple. They partook in the darkness and had to suffer the consequences of their choice. I am sure it was a huge loss for God, a kind of darkness even for God, a pain in the heart of God. God had invested so much on this relationship with us. Did God not grieve as Adam and Eve walked out the gate of Eden? However, against this second

darkness, God's light had to shine more brightly and it did, being challenged by the deeper darkness. Our humanity never lost the light but it was damaged and wounded. Lucifer was not as strong as God to destroy the light. The creature cannot destroy the creator. God, unconditionally loving us, never gave up on the People he created. God has been with us in all of our history, sending us prophets to give us hope, calling us back, promising that God will come again and finally destroy the power of darkness over us.

God's message through Isaiah was one of hope, of seeing a great light in the land of gloom and darkness, abundant joy and great rejoicing because the Lord had smashed the power of darkness and slavery. Jesus is the light coming into the world and his presence and birth that we celebrate at this time of year witness to this. God delighted in Jesus, the Son. "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." This bond of unconditional love between Father and Son helped Jesus accept His human condition and transform it for us. Jesus, our brother, gives us this good news, that God is well pleased with Him and with us as His siblings and family of God. We can live in this world and manage the effects of the Fall in a new way, like Jesus.

In our human condition today, in 2010, in our lived experience, we know the darkness just like Adam and Eve. Working as a clinical and pastoral psychologist at a pastoral counseling center, I see the effects of the darkness within my clients, within myself, and in our interactions. I see the depressions, the anxieties, the addictions, the brokenness and fragility caused by the effects of traumas on persons, and families, and society. I hear men and women struggling with their sin, shame, guilt, anger, fear, envy, in unhealthy ways, desperately seeking healing, salvation, unconditional love, to be accepted by others, to hear God say "You are my beloved son or daughter in whom I am well pleased." I have seen my own darkness, weakness, fragility and impatience with myself and my clients. Yet, I believe in the goodness deep within my clients. God's light has never left them, even if they feel it has. This goodness and light is from God's Spirit urging them from deep within to heal, although the darkness has encrusted them in its tentacles. The message of Isaiah is that the light is stronger than the darkness. Jesus has come among us, walked our shoes, a wounded healer too, who knows us from the inside out, accompanies us in His Spirit, never abandons us, and show us the unconditional love of God despite our darkness and sin. This salvation is good news because something has changed and is radically different.

Paradise which was lost has been regained. Our darkness now is different, a third darkness, closer to the first darkness before the Fall and yet not as dark as the darkness of the Fall which has been washed away by the blood of Christ. Out of this cleansed new darkness, the new void, God can create anew, make a new creation. Jesus is the new Adam, who takes us back to the garden, walking in the cool of the evening with God, and our darkness and effects of the Fall, and human condition, are tolerable and within a larger framework of forgiveness and mercy and salvation. The light has changed the darkness, colored it, transformed it. Paradise has been regained but now includes our history of God's love affair with us despite our sin, betrayal, and rejection. The light shines more brightly because of the darkness.

I see my work with clients is now a continuation of the ministry of Jesus in helping them find their Spirit, deeply rooted and saved in Jesus' Spirit, because I am finding my own Spirit, deeply rooted and saved in Jesus. Being held by God, I can hold others and help them find God holding them, loving them,

delighting in them. My clients bring me the message too because they minister to me, revealing to me God's Spirit at work in my life and work. God is with his People. His loss and grieving for us has been soothed. Our loss of God has also been soothed. God's tears and our tears are no longer of missing each other but are of joy, of reconciling, of forgiveness. In our land of gloom, a light has shone in the darkness, and there is great rejoicing – God is with His People.