

First Sunday of Advent
The Reverend John H. Brock

8:30 a.m. Sunday, November 28, 2010
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Isaiah 2:1-5; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:36-44

Grace to you and peace from God who is, who was, and who is to come.

I can almost see Isaiah standing there in the market, no one paying attention to him, as he begins to sing this song. "In the days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways, and that we may walk in his paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth instruction and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord." (Isaiah 2:1-5)

Isaiah spoke those words to the people of Judah at a time when things looked dark. Their northern, neighboring, sibling nation of Israel was no more. Israel had been wiped out by the very country with whom Judah had aligned themselves with in order to fend off an attack by a consortium of countries, and in the process, Judah became a vassal.

Life continued. A shadow loomed over everyone's head. Here was Isaiah, against the odds, against convention, standing in the market place singing a song of . . . hope, singing a song of . . . promise, singing a song of . . . light. Yet that light does not always shine when and where we need it. Even now, even today, the days are getting darker, the light fades quicker. It is harder and harder to feel the warmth or bask in the rays. As we look at the world around us for those rays of light, of late, we can see the light less and less.

As example, for reasons that few of us can comprehend, one nation, its own people starving, while a very chosen few of the elite live in opulence, and they bomb a small island of their neighboring, sibling country. Then posture that they are on the cusp of total invasion, yet another conflict on a battle infested planet, on a war weary peninsula. Where is the light?

A couple of weeks ago I had a woman, not yet forty, sitting in my office. Her husband of over twenty years had heart surgery. He was at home on medical leave. His employment is guaranteed, but right now there is no income. She herself was in an automobile accident a couple of months ago, and cannot work. They have used up their savings. None of their parents are in any shape, either financially or physically, to help out. Their small congregation has done what they can to help. With one child in college and the other in high school, where is the light in their life?

I don't know where the light in your life is. I know that at this time of year especially, bills tend to pile up. Decisions need to be made. Which bill gets paid first, which can be put off for a week, for a month? Here we are on the tail end of that great American holiday of Thanksgiving. How many families got together this year for the first time? Or the first time in several years? How many for what they vowed would be the last time? As we gathered together, how many families rejoiced with one another? How many families fought with each other? Where is the light?

As Jesus was speaking with his disciples, he talked not about the Now, but he talked rather about What Is to Come. Rather along the lines of the old saying, "It's always darkest before the dawn," Jesus tells us that this world will NOT be our friend. This world is *not* going to be bathed in the light; rather this world will work *against* God. This world is going to work against all those that claim God, all those who love God, all those who follow God. The world without Christ, the world without faith and the world without hope, is a dark and lonely place.

Yet, in the words from Isaiah, did you hear the promise? The promise that God will teach us the holy way. The promise that God will teach us the right way. God will teach us the way that we as humans, on our own, will never be able to achieve. But God gives us the hope of what is to come. We can talk about swords into plowshares; we can talk about spears into pruning hooks; we can talk about military becoming farmers; but that is not our reality right now.

Right now our reality is teenagers who try to bomb Christmas tree lightings. Our reality is drug gangs that build sophisticated tunnels to smuggle illegal goods. Our reality is obsessed boyfriends who kill their former girlfriends. That is the way of the world.

We are called to the light. We are called to remember the words of Jesus. 'Be ready,' he says. 'I am coming.' 'Be ready,' he says. 'I am the light.'

Let us walk in that light together.

Amen.