

The First Presbyterian Church of Redlands

Rev. Cheryl Raine

December 24, 2019 – Christmas Eve

Scripture Reading – Isaiah 64:1-5a, 8

Read in Indonesian by Harry Muaya

¹ O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence – ² as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil – to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence!

Read in Spanish by Izar Martinez

³ When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. ⁴ From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for you.

Read in Urdu Susan Bakhsh

⁵ You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember your ways. ⁸ For we are the clay, and you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand. ¹ O that you would tear open the heavens and come down.

Scripture Reading

Isaiah 9:2, 6 – 7a

Pastor Cheryl

² The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined. ⁶ For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace.

Christmas Meditation is entitled, *Among Us Now.*

I remember asking at the beginning of December where did November go? You may be asking this night where did December go? Wasn't it just Sunday, December 1st? Especially given that the time between Thanksgiving and Christmas was as short as it can possibly be this year. Even so, we made it, take a deep breath and breathe in the beauty of this night. We have gathered together to worship, to hear our story, to sing of our faith and to celebrate the truth that God is among us now.

The cry of God's people heard through the prophet Isaiah, "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down," has been fulfilled. "For unto us a child has been born... and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. The prophet Isaiah also shared these words, "Look a young woman is with child, and shall name him Immanuel," which means God is with us. And then angels spoke to both Mary and Joseph saying, "And you shall name this child Jesus."

Indeed, what child is this that is among us now? Have you thought about all these names that we find in Scripture? The wonderful facets of the One who is among us now as a babe in a manger. Jesus the compassionate One. Jesus the powerful One. Jesus who is and who was and who is to come. Jesus ushers in peace, but not as the world gives. Jesus is God with us, or when the prologue of the Gospel of John is translated literally it means something like this: Jesus pitched his tent right smack in the middle of

The First Presbyterian Church of Redlands

Rev. Cheryl Raine

December 24, 2019 – Christmas Eve

our neighborhoods! I don't know what name of names speaks most clearly to you tonight, but none of these names fully describe the miracle of our faith, for God, the creator of everything seen and unseen, humbly chose to be born a babe and was named Jesus. This should take our breath away, for who among us would willingly empty ourselves for the sake of all others and all of creation?

We pause this night, amidst all the family celebrations that will take place, to remember the One who was sent to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners... [and] to comfort all who mourn." For through the miracle of Jesus the kingdom of God has come near.

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined." We are these very people tonight. We know all too well the reality of the darkness in our world today. The kingdom of God has come near, but it certainly is not yet fully present. There is so much work yet to be done to usher in the endless peace Isaiah envisioned.

We have seen a great light in this precious child born of Mary and Joseph whom we gather to worship this night. A light so great that it is not overcome by darkness. A light that is in Jesus as well as in each one of us.

You might remember the lyrics of the children's song entitled, "This Little Light of Mine." "This little light of mine, I am gonna let it shine!" is the phrase most of us know. But what about the actual verse? Listen to the words:

The light that shines is the light of love.
Lights the darkness from above,
It shines on you and it shine on me,
And it shows what the light of love can do.
I'm gonna shine my light both far and near,
I'm gonna shine my light bright and clear,
Where there's a dark corner in this land,
I'm gonna let my little light shine.

That is what we are called to do with new zeal this Holy Night and in the days to come. Christ is among us now. Yet, Christ's light is not confined to Christ. Christ's light is not confined to this sanctuary or any sanctuary. Christ's light is in us. So, the question for us this night is whether or not we will let our little light shine into a dark corner in this land.

Will you be like Jahkil Naseem Jackson who was inspired by his Aunt as they distributed food to Chicago homeless when he was only 5 years old. At the tender age of 8, Jackson's little light started shining for he started *Project I Am* to build awareness of homelessness and to help the homeless population. He and his organization have distributed blessing bags touching 35,000 men, women and children literally across the world, for he has organized distribution of his blessing bags in eight states and three foreign countries in response to disasters. Jackson's little light brings good news to the poor.

Will you let your light shine like Stacie Alonso who opened Noah's Animal House, a full-service pet shelter located right on the grounds of a domestic violence shelter in Las Vegas? Stacie was inspired while serving on a board of a women's shelter, for she

The First Presbyterian Church of Redlands

Rev. Cheryl Raine

December 24, 2019 – Christmas Eve

discovered that women fleeing domestic abuse often had nowhere to go because women's shelters wouldn't accept their pets. Alonso was shocked to learn that in many cases, women would go back to their abusive situations to remain with their beloved pet. Alonso's little light shines binding up the broken hearted by providing a safe place for women as well as for their beloved pets.

Will you be like 18-year-old Jemima Browning who let her light shine by creating a welcoming space for those with intellectual and developmental disabilities? Browning loved to swim and did so competitively, but realized that her brother Will, who has Down Syndrome, didn't have the same opportunities. So, she created Tadcaster Stingrays, an inclusive swim squad in North Yorkshire England. Kids between 11 and 18 train with their friends, compete, and reap the lifelong benefits of being part of a coached swim team. Jemima's little light proclaims liberty and release for full inclusion.

How does your little shine far and near, bright and clear? How might it shine with new zeal in the coming days and year? Where might your light be needed most? I don't know where you are being called to shine. But, I do know that Christ is among us as the glorious Light that is not overcome by darkness and each of us is to be Christ's light into this world. Will you use the little light that Christ has placed within you to shine? I pray so. Let your little light shine this night and always! Amen.