

BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI

THE WORSHIP OF GOD • JANUARY 20, 2019

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EPIPHANY

Litany

WRITTEN BY TERRY OVERFELT

INSPIRED BY THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN HYMN, *I WANT JESUS TO WALK WITH ME*,
AND NARRATIVES OF REV. DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

I want Jesus to walk with me.

All along my pilgrim journey,

I want Jesus to walk with me.

And as we walk, we will make the pledge that
we will always march ahead – we cannot turn back.

In my trials, Lord, walk with me.

When my heart is almost breaking,

I want Jesus to walk with me.

The crooked places will be made straight
and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all flesh will see it together.

When I'm troubled, Lord, walk with me.

When my head is bowed in sorrow,

I want Jesus to walk with me.

With this faith, we will be able to hew out
of the mountain of despair a stone of hope.

All along my pilgrim journey,

I want Jesus to walk with me.

The Scripture

Isaiah 62:1-5

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch. The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

The Message

Her Righteousness Shines

Terry Overfelt

The Voice

In this day, we hear and are emboldened by the voice of the prophet in Isaiah. “*For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, God rejoices over you. Her righteousness shines.*” Who is *she* of whom the prophet speaks?

In these days, 500-800 years before the birth of Christ, the prophet in is calling out the restoration of Jerusalem, the City of Zion, the City of David, the holy place of promise for the people of God, long before they were even taken captive. The prophet speaks of a wrecked Israel. The people of promise were carried away. The poor and infirmed are left in ruin.

After 50-60 years in Babylon, the Persian King Cyrus, became emboldened by a hundreds-year-old prophecy listing him, by name, as the one who would release captive Israel and at last send them back to their land. It was a desolate, desert place that was hardly recognizable. It was agonizing, humiliating, and Israel seemingly lost herself to the oppressive nation. The enemy triumphed over them and trashed the beloved community of God. The ones God chose to carry the teaching and light of love into the world were devastated.

The Restoration

Today’s Old Testament prophecy speaks boldly to restoration in the ruin. The prophet calls through the ages to us, to call upon a faithful God to restore us to the glory intended for us.

The prophet likens these devastated and now restored people to brides and grooms on their wedding day; a new creation, beautiful, hand-in-hand with God, delighted in, redeemed, restorable, rejoicing and rejoiced over, even while and especially in the face of forsakenness and desolation. It doesn’t take a ruined kingdom or a murderous king to land us in a place of oppression and ruin.

It can be a ruined relationship, a wreck, a death, disease, disaster, depression, addiction, or depravity of all sorts.

We get it. We no longer see the places of glory, and we don’t think we can continue to hope. We have skeptical expectations of deserts in their place if we do. And we hear the mockery and name calling of us by our bullies, defeated, abandoned, and

deserted. Stay down, ruined Jerusalem, yet the prophet says this, “I won’t keep silent until *her righteousness shines.*”

Your God rejoices over you in the prophecy and predictability of your being restored after destruction and loss. If only we could believe it. What is it one of you said to me this week? “We are still in awe. Nobody saw the miracle coming.”

This miracle of restoration is always God’s intention with us. God sets us into being as **human**. We are vulnerable. We succumb to stuff. We cause stuff. Yet, people of God, consciously or unconsciously, we will be part of the restoration. God gets in there with us and Isaiah is giving us the words to move us forward. Don’t sit still until, “*Her righteousness shines.*”

Why Now in the Church Season?

Here on the heels of Christmas came a threat from King Herod to the Christ Child. Then in the epiphany came the warning to the kings to slink home by another way. Joseph had to take his family to another country to be safe. Spiritual warfare is a given in the human condition.

And we land in January two-thousand-years later where the struggles and fears for power, and threats against the acquisition of such, are still very much a part of humanity’s story. That’s why January Epiphany presents a perfect opportunity to illuminate justice and its crusaders, who believe in this restoration.

We chose to not only see the famous but also to seek the lesser known activists, who were essential in the backlit shadows of the stardom. Hopefully, that’s where we can see ourselves, if not now, then somehow as bearers of God’s light that shines from the depths of our vindicated hearts, from our feet and out to the corners of the earth, beneath the stars. And we will not keep silent!

Who Are We Talking To?

What is this call from the prophet to not keep silent?

As the glory of God is a burning presence in us, it is visible to the nations. We have been newly-named when we realize whose we are.

Are we like Isaiah who is...

- Calling out to the world to embolden ourselves?
- Is it a cry of witness to inspire - another?
- Or is this a war hoop to put our adversaries on notice?

-Or is the prophet calling out - to remind God to make good on the sacred promises to us?

Any way you look at this, for the sake of building God's kingdom, our restlessness and torch bearing affirm, and we have everything to gain by walking in this expectation, confidence, and celebration. Our silence will not save us; finding our voices will.

How Now? Who are our prophetic voices?

It was easy for me to pick a star to follow. Tomorrow will be the day to remember the legacy of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.; a minister, a prophet, who saw the dream of justice for all Humankind and peacefully marched and protested racial discrimination in federal and state law. Like his fellow prophet, Isaiah, he was martyred for his conviction.

He did not align with any political party in establishing the civil rights movement. He aligned, like Isaiah, with the intentions of God for all of humanity.

"The biblical demand for justice was as pertinent in our day as in the days of the ancient prophets." -The Editors March 22, 2018.

Martin Luther King Jr. was a shining star, drawing us toward the place where we could see and hear the cries of the poor and oppressed in our land.

And now to...

The Star Beneath Him.

This third Monday of January was first established as a national holiday in 1986, and 14-years later adopted by all 50 states. It was his widow, Coretta Scott King, who pressed it into being, so that all would remember him.

"Her righteousness shines."

Yet this woman, beneath the star of MLK, was grounded from being at his side after motherhood. It was 60-years ago. Coretta Scott King rose from "Beneath the Star," when his light was extinguished.

Four days after his assassination, she led a silent march of 50,000 people through the streets of Memphis, Tennessee. She continued his voice and emboldened her own from his funeral address to be the first woman to speak to students of Harvard. She established the MLK Center for Nonviolent Social Change. She developed the Full-Employment Action Council of over 100 religious, business, labor, civil and women's rights organizations dedicated to a national policy of full employment and equal economic opportunity. She created the Coalition of Conscience with over 800 human-

rights organizations sponsoring the March on Washington. She lived another 37-years. She worked as an advocate for justice and the arts.

And here's one where I want to aim my telescope: *The Coretta Scott King Award for Books*. "Designed to commemorate the life and works of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and to honor Mrs. Coretta Scott King for her courage and determination to continue the work for peace, the Coretta Scott King Book Awards annually recognize outstanding books for young adults and children that reflect the African-American experience. Further, the Award encourages the artistic expression of the black experience via literature and the graphic arts in biographical, social, and historical treatments by African American authors and illustrators."

One Award winner from 2018 is, *The Stars Beneath Our Feet* by David Barclay Moore. A 12-year-old boy tries to steer a safe path through the projects in Harlem in the wake of his brother's death to gun violence. There are people, who are trying to help him navigate his way through the hardship and despair to find a path to a better life. The arts, via a Lego creation, help him to find it. With great heart, this novel celebrates community and creativity.

Parental supervision, or better yet, partnership is advised, as some of the coming-of-age issues are detailed. Here are some thoughts from the book:

"...when you die, they bury you, but your soul flies to the stars. Your mama, your daddy – they were buried under the ground, but they're stars now, girl, stars beneath our feet."

"...I had learned the most important thing: the decisions you make can become your life. Your choices are you."

The Power of Story is layered in richness:

- Coretta Scott King's encouragement for black artistic voice in word and images.
- The empathy that these art forms draw from us, drawing us into an understanding that engages us with the human condition of each other.
- These works help us to join Isaiah's admonition to counter abandonment and desertion with speaking the promised story of restoration.
- Be healed in the telling and retelling of your story, "I won't keep silent, I won't sit still."
- The power of story is the art form used by Jesus to draw us into empathy.
- With parable, he helped us to tap into the human condition as a magnetic tool for understanding.

Isaiah tells us the story of Zion, of Israel and the people who were born for so much more than captivity.

Jesus told us stories of what the kingdom of God is like, and it usually began with a story about the other.

Thanks for the stars that are Martin Luther and Coretta Scott King. God, thanks for the way you use arts, voice, walks, and even death to draw us to see and be a light. Encourage us to listen and follow in the ways of storytellers like Jesus, who taught us the ways of God and God's delight in all of us and God's intention to restore.

Benediction

Next Sunday, Nick will have us examine a famous photo that launched a starry movement for humanity.

Meanwhile, let us see one another as human family on the only inhabited planet, as far as science and scope can see.

We are the righteous, shining, intention of God.

In the words of the crew of Apollo 8, looking at Earth from space, "God bless all of you, all of you on the good Earth."

"God rejoices because of you." -Isaiah