

Sunday January 2, 2022
First Lesson Isaiah 60: 1-6
Gospel Lesson: Matthew 2: 1-12
Sermon: Another Year is Dawning
Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

Hymnist Frances Ridley Havergal took New Year's Day very seriously, always using it as a time of reflection and often composing a poem to send to friends expressing her feelings about the new day and year. The one she wrote in 1874 has become immortal. She was thirty-six at the time, and she dashed off this poem and had it printed on a specially designed greeting card to be sent to friends. The card was captioned, "Happy New Year! Ever such may it be!" The inside said:

*Another year is dawning:
Dear Father, let it be,
In working or in waiting,
Another year with Thee;*

*Another year of progress,
Another year of praise,
Another year of proving
Thy presence all the days.*

So this poem has unexpectedly helped me to set the framework for how I would like to embrace this upcoming year of 2022 both personally and professionally.

- For as I attempt to weave in both our first lesson of Isaiah 60 and our gospel of Matthew 2 to set the foundation for where I am going this morning; looking first at Isaiah, where it says *Arise, shine; for your light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you*; my initial response to this declaration that was initially a beautiful poem intended for the audience known as the new Jerusalem; where the scripture is not referring to the literal city of Jerusalem, but instead it is

referring to spiritual Israel, the Church of the New Testament;

- My initial response to this is to name that, **I want to arise too** in the year of 2022;
- **I want to arise** from the despair that came from 2020 and 2021;
- **I want to arise** from the valley of fear and anxiety of it all;
- And shine...I mean really shine **in the midst of it all; in spite of it all;** I want the glory of the Lord to shine through me, but most importantly, **I want to make sure that I do not miss the glory** from the Lord that has risen upon me; **that has risen upon us**, as the lesson of Isaiah 60 informs us that is there.
- As I peak at the gospel of Matthew 2: 1-12; I feel led to name that I want to somehow embody this internal knowing that those three wise men had; to possess the sense to follow that bright star, that led

them to the Prince of Peace, the Lord of Lords; the sweet essence of God; contained in this angelic, perfect innocent baby; that I imagine Mary was holding close to her bosom;

- Church, **I want to be keenly in tune with this inner knowing**, that these wise men must have possessed; to discern that what laid before them was more than just a baby; **as sweet at this baby was**; to take the moment to worship the glory that was revealed before their very eyes in human form;
- **I want this same inner knowing** that these wise men must have had; where as I would have probably purchased a card from Hallmark, some balloons, a stuffed animal and a package of pampers, because a baby could never have too many diapers right?
- But instead, these three wise men thought to bring forth gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh too;

because they understood the glory that was before them;

- They understood that at this very moment, that another year was dawning for them;
- And the reason why we know that they understood the significance of the moment that they were in, is because if you jump down to the verse 12 of our gospel this morning, you will note that upon paying this homage to the glorious birth of Christ, the Word tells us “having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road;”
- So why this is significant all in itself, is simply the fact that receiving a powerful vision or not; it is difficult for many of us to just change our lives at the drop of a hat; to move from our homes; to move away from what is familiar to us; to travel a road we have never been down before;

- However, these three wise men understood the glory that was before them enough, that although they may not have fully understood why the dream presented itself the way that it had; they were faithful to it; they were obedient to it; for there was this inner knowing that this dream came from God;
- So it was their faith in God's light; it was their faith in this bright star; that carried them this far without harm;
- But instead it was this star that gave them the courage to embrace that another year was truly dawning for them;
- A year where they were not aware of all of the particulars of how it would unfold, but what I admire about these wise men, is that they were willing to travel another road;
- I am inspired that these wise men were courageous enough to embrace another road;

- And so then tying more directly how this poem fits in for me ;

*Another year is dawning:
Dear Father, let it be,
In working or in waiting,
Another year with Thee;
Another year of progress,
Another year of praise,
Another year of proving
Thy presence all the days.*

- four questions has emerged for me that I am hoping you might consider asking of yourselves as we approach another year;
- 1)What do you anticipate happening this new year of 2022 that is dawning?
- 2) What does our work look like in this upcoming year and what does the wait look like in this work?
- 3) What does progress look like in this work we have named for ourselves?

- 4)How do we share our progress with others?
- **For my answer to question #1; What do you anticipate happening this new year of 2022 that is dawning?**
- **On a personal note....** If I am honest, as I get older I feel myself kicking and screaming through the next transition that God has been trying to bring me through; for I am at the age of 42 and here is my testimony on our fertility struggle....for we are all beginning to know one another well enough where I feel that I can divulge this.... But I made a resolution... that if the month of December passed and Stephen and I would not become pregnant; which we did not fall pregnant.... I would totally embrace this new year dawning, letting go of this desire to mother our own biological child. For our fertility struggle started out roughly 4 years ago, but it has been in these four years where I have begun to realize that these 4 children in our home are

indeed our children. Biological or not..it does not matter..... for they are indeed ours. For our banking account **lets us know that they are ours;** our grocery bills inform us **that they are ours;** but also our hearts knows that biological or not; **these children are ours and we are theirs;**

- So as I embrace this truth personally, I anticipate a freedom awakening within me that I have never considered before;
- I anticipate closer and stronger relationships with my children and within my marriage, because I am no longer wishing for something that has already been here!
- Sometimes you have to let go to become.
- And my anticipations do not stop there Church, for as I attempt to answer **question number 2;** What does our work look like in this upcoming year and what does the wait look like in this work?

- I anticipate this year being a time of meaningful work of service of God's love. Furthermore it is in this same work where I anticipate that there will be times of waiting for instructions for my next steps in this work. Either way, I am anticipating a lot of hope coming from these experiences of working and waiting. Regarding hope and how to discover it; This week, I have taken some time to just be in a time of leisure. And so it was in a moment of leisure where I found myself reading a magazine called Fitness for women and came across some valuable insights to share; from one of their articles **regarding hope**. The first point they declared for their readers to do was in times of despair, to call on your hope hero. The article said that *when you feel despair creep in, simply reach out to someone who shows hopefulness in their life*. **The second point** they encouraged their readers to do in their quest for hope was *to look for tiny glimmers of*

good. To instantly lift your spirits, try on hope-colored glasses by looking for “glimmers” of good.

So you see why I love this suggestion is that typically people tend to look for errors in things. Along these lines; I came across a meaningful Anonymous quote online that says; *“Go 24 hours without complaining. (Not even once). Then watch how your life starts changing.”* I think both of these statements are really onto something! **Finally the third point** they encouraged their readers to do regarding hope was by naming that *one of the best ways to quell fear and cue hope is through spirituality and support.* So that last point excited me for obvious reasons; to name that Church and community are necessary for us to have in this New Year that is dawning. For being with you all truly makes everything better for me.....and I hope that by coming here, you feel the same. For we are truly stronger together....well enough of that

sentimental stuff because I still have a sermon to finish!

- In answering **the third question** that I raised from our poem of reflection; what does progress look like in all of this that I have named? For me, my first step of how to measure my own personal progress in doing this work of service and love is to be intentional about chronicling my interactions and experiences with my family, friends, community and more; through journaling, social media, recording videos and taking pictures that capture all of this love! **I plan to** pause more and stop and smell the roses more, in all of the experiences that I encounter. **I plan to** take more time to listen to the stories that the people share with me; **I plan to** make everyday, feel like what I think the kingdom might look like in my heart and within the community around me. **In fact I plan to create** kingdom moments in everything I do; that might

create an experience towards those around me that might generate love, fellowship and belonging. So this is a long way of my naming that I plan to chronicle all of these experiences and stories; to measure the progress of what the Lord has done and will continue to do in my life and the community that surrounds me...for it is so easy to forget these “kindom” moments, when you and I are having a bad day or a bad season or perhaps even a bad year or years.....so this is why I am chronicling so that I do not forget or overlook the progress that love is having on myself and the community that surrounds me.

- **Leading me to share my final answer to question four** of how we share this progress with others; for the last line of the poem named it as this being *another year of proving thy presence all the days*; so what does this look like in real life ?My personal answer to this question is naming that the

proof is when you and I become consistent in our work in areas of addressing the hunger, thirst, spiritual and physical needs of those who we come in contact with.

- We must make what we do in our families and communities that surround us a lifestyle practice..
- We must make the act of service and love a new spiritual habit;
- For there is a statistic that I would like to share with you that I learned years ago; that in order for you and I to create a new habit it takes about 3 weeks...and then it takes about another 3 weeks for this new habit to really stick;
- So one of the habits that I would like to testify about that my husband and I have been working on together is our relationship with money and what has transformed within me.
- For I have gone from buying a lot of clothes and surface stuff, to now budgeting our finances based

on how I can give more back to my community and church.

- Now you need to know that I did not anticipate this sermon even addressing money, but I just have to give this personal testimony to someone who I know will get it.....which is y'all.. but please hear my giving testimony... that when I focused my finances more on material wants and needs, I could never seem to save enough , earn enough and I lived paycheck to paycheck.
- Then Covid hit us and as tragic as it has been on our economy and our lives; these experiences have taught us how to be more efficient with our finances. As a result, Steve and I are saving more, and loving life more while doing so! This is mainly because I am convinced that our priorities has been focused more on giving more; and as a result of giving more, I find that I am less anxious about bills and other financial stressors, because through

the act of giving, I have begun to also experience that God is giving more as well; which then lets me know that God will take care of us, just as God makes sure that the lilies of the field are clothed and that the birds are fed.

- So the progress is evident in our lives in so many ways that I haven't named.
- Why I have been sharing so intimately with you all this morning is because it is in our sharing that I believe we do inspire others to approach their own lives with a sense of hope and anticipation; that can inform others that they too can improve their situation;
- That can inform others that not only are they not alone but on the contrary, we are all interconnected in such an intentional way, that I am convinced that this was the true intent of God's design;
- That although the problem may be before us in whatever that might be; so is indeed the solution;

- That informs us that although there is a mystery among us; a mystery called life, that we all may never completely figure out on this side of the Jordan; there is still a miracle among us waiting to be discovered and explored;
- Miracles where 5 loaves and 2 fish feeds thousands of people with baskets leftover;
- Miracles where people who may have been spiritually bleeding out for years like the woman with the issues of blood, are now healed as a result of being invited into communities such as this, because they learned about a love that truly and fully applies to them too...
- So this is the impact of this beautiful poem on my life; This is how I plan to arise and shine in the midst of; with the hopes of being as bold and faithful as our three wise men, who understood that their main task was to keep following that star;

- I hope that you all will find value in exploring these 4 questions I have raised from this poem as it pertains to your own lives and experiences:

1. What do you anticipate happening this year with the new year dawning?
2. What does your work look like; what does the wait look like in this work?
3. What does progress look like in these initiatives you have personally thought about;
4. How do we share our progress with others?

Either way, another year is dawning;

May we all be comforted with the inner knowing that the best is truly yet to come!

Let the Church Say Amen and Hallelujah! Happy New Year!