

Isaiah 60:1-6; Matthew 2:1-12
Epiphany Sunday, Year A

January 5, 2014
Gordon Allaby

HOW DO YOU SAY IT?

Wonderful, artistic images are presented in the Isaiah text.
An awe inspiring sunrise comes to mind.

"Arise, shine for your light has come....the Lord will arise upon you."
This is the picture of the Glory of God--of God's revelation of power and holiness.

"Lift up your eyes and look around"
From all over the world, they will come to you.
From far away, all people will acknowledge and affirm you.
The sun will rise on you. Your day,... your day is about to begin.

Caravans will swarm to you, and some from distant lands will bring you royal gifts of frankincense and gold.

~~~~~

Of course, verse 6 is connected to the story of the Magi who carried gifts of frankincense, gold and myrrh for the new born king.

We are very familiar with the Matthew 2 story about the Magi, also known as Wise men.

They were called Wise men because they were seekers / searchers of awareness.

~~~~~

Knowledge, experience and/or information does NOT make one wise.

Wisdom comes from openness and asking questions.

Wonder and awe are the aura of wisdom.

A wise person hungers for what is beyond, and is eager to change and grow. And, all are prerequisites for contemplating God.

~~~~~

Those wise men came from far away, travelling in darkness guided by the illumination of the star, seeking the fulfillment.

Their hopeful journey required that they follow the light and ask questions along the way.

They possessed great confidence in their hope of presenting gifts to the new born king.

~~~~~

Hope is the purpose of the Isaiah text.

One of the authors of Isaiah likely wrote all of the last 6 chapters.

Those chapters are uplifting hopeful messages for depressed and distraught people. It's a familiar scenario.

Yet again, God's children are troubled and giving up hope.

We might find that surprisingly disappointing, if the same were not true for each of us. We know the pattern oh too well.

It seems, over and over again, we are either ignoring God or begging God to rescue us. Rare are the occasions when we joyously, contentedly stroll through the day with God,.... only desiring to give and asking for nothing.

~~~~~

The Biblical Hebrews had that same old pattern, too. We tend to dismiss endless errors as "human nature", but perhaps it is simply *natural development*.

We can learn and grow from errors. Searching for light in the darkness is full of stumbling and falling down. And, maybe that is the reason we need love -- to love and be loved. Maybe love picks us up and pulls us forward.

Moreover, I think that is the reason for this passage. Isaiah crafted a wonderful, hopeful message as an expression of God's love.

Even though, the Biblical Hebrews kept faltering and getting in trouble and so do we, God doesn't give up on us. God comes to us like a star in the night.....prompting, encouraging us to carry on.

Over and over again, God gives us a message of hope / reasons to keep going. And, I'm convinced that such messages, like today's Isaiah text, are God's way of saying "I love you." God is saying "I love you."

~~~~~

God says "I love you" in more meaningful ways than merely stating the three words.

Hearing "I love you" for the first time is powerful, yet its impact is greatly diminished with subsequent use.

That is why we must use better ways to show / to express love than just saying it. In addition, just feeling it / merely having the emotion is not good enough. Willy Nelson's song, "You were always on my mind" is a pitiful copout. Sure, insecurity, fear and self protection can cause us to hide our love, but that's selfish and there is NO Such thing as selfish love.

Love is like Light--it must shine to be light / it must radiate outward. Love illuminates, empowers and enriches,..... and it is healing.

Love reaches out. Love gives, and expressing love is much more than saying, "I love you."

~~~~~

Giving people the vision of a sunrise is a better way to say, "I love you." than just using the three words. Informing depressed, downtrodden people that soon they will be appreciated, even honoured is very loving.

In Isaiah 61, God shares that God is calling out all people to be ministers for justice and wholeness.

God is working hard to restore / to save the world / to bring peace and fulfillment to the hearts of all..... and that is love in action.

And, the most glorious love statement of all is to give self.  
Jesus is such a gift--God in person..... for you, me and everyone.

That is God saying, "I love you."

~~~~~

Beyond a star in the night, the gift of Christ and all the Biblical messages, how does God say, "I love you" to us..... to you?

?????

Could it be in a sunrise, a song, a smile.....or a message from a friend at just the right moment?

How is God saying, "I love you"?

?????????

Is it hard to recall many such occasions?

Are we not hearing..... or Seeing the message?

???????

The Isaiah text prompts us to arise, to lift up our "soul" eyes and look around.

So,.....let's look around for clues.

~~~~~

How do others express love?

How have you felt love / experienced love from someone else?

How has the message of love come to you?

~~~~~

An even better question / a more informative question is:

How do you express love?

How do you say it? ?????

~~~~~

As with God, the expression depends on the situation.

There are countless variations to radiant beams of giving self.

Sometimes, silently being "present" is a delightful statement of love.

To be sure, love is conveyed through giving of self.

How do you say it?

?????????

Expressions of love can be sharing illumination / by giving hope / by revealing a better way.

This doesn't have to be "tough love". A better method for lifting someone up is by empowering and inspiring the person.

Still, sometimes the Good News is first bad news.

~~~~~

If it is giving of self, without conditions, then it is surely love.

How do you say it?

Occasionally, it's not easy. There are times when loving actions or words are hard to find. Maybe it's awkward or the situation is difficult.

~~~~~

For example, how does a pastor say to the congregation, "I love you."?  
That's not easy because a pastor is paid to do ministry / acts of kindness.

I think a personal infusion into routines and duties can convey that message.  
Carefully creating the 2013 year end slide show was intended as an act of love.

~~~~~

When there are barriers or brokenness in a relationship, how do you say it?
Even in those dark times, there is love waiting to be free.

In such occasions, God shared hope and promised a better tomorrow.
And, God gave wise men a star in the night, and the wise men, even when confronted by a very nasty person, asked illuminating questions.
Allow the heart to speak, even if it hurts.

Love will catch fire with questions--open, searching questions.
Love grows when we don't give up / when we keep searching.

Open to change / giving self to the unknown,...in hope...is an act of love. Accepting others / being inclusive because we are not the judge is being loving and it is also trusting God.
Reaching out for the light / for the goodness in all those we meet is demonstrating a very gracious love.

Expecting to see the divine in all situations, and giving ourselves to God are wonderful statements of love.

Being ministers / ambassadors for justice and wholeness is being loving.

Charging a strangers battery, giving away food or helping the weak and powerless is speaking God's love.

How do you say it?

How do you say, "I love you" to God and to others?

~~~~~

In addition, How do you say it to yourself?

It's almost impossible to radiate the love of God when we are extinguishing the light within us.

Feed the fire.

Nurture your soul, mind and body.

Reach out in the night.      Ask lots of questions.

Search..... and never stop learning and changing.

Be as wise men.....keep going until your passion for life discovers God's passion for you.

A new dawn begins when we rise up and see God beaming love all over the world.

And, .....that Epiphany is discovered when love frees us to tear down our protective curtains in the pursuit of love.

Love is like that.....it is as the first rays of morning light.  
It comes to us,..... and we are drawn to it.

God is with us.

Look around.....

There is love.....

And,.....God will show you how to say it.

~~~~~