

SERMON: “Arise & Shine: Eternal Light.”

Rev. Geoff Ross Sunday, December 20, 2020, St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church.

[So, the countdown to Christmas has begun! Less than 6 days to go! That’s less than 144 hours/8,640 minutes/518,400-518,399-518,398 seconds – but, who’s counting? More than tiny tots with their eyes all aglow/from 1 to 92 have been counting the days: With/without COVID19 the stores started putting out Christmas flyers/decorations/merchandise as soon as Hallowe’en was in the rearview mirror/don’t get me started about Christmas music... BUT, the thing about countdowns is they only work if you know what’s coming – like rockets lifting off. If it’s anything like the last 2 minutes of a basketball/football game – or, worse, a soccer ‘match’/a baby being born – then countdowns never seem to end....]

For us – post Christmas/Easter People – Christmas is an annual thing/it’s come and gone for centuries, but for the People of God hearing Daniel’s prophecy for the first time, the future-deferred/long-postponed promised coming of the Messiah/Saviour/“Wonderful Counselor/Mighty God/Everlasting Father/Prince of Peace” was beginning to sound like fake news/hollow words/worse; lies. So it was that the words of Daniel 12:1-3 sounded a lot like yet another false alarm/two-minute warning. And what is he predicting? “The End is Nigh!”/“It’s the end of the world as we know it!”: Daniel message is a warning – time’s almost up! And, it won’t be pretty: literally, a disaster of biblical proportions/OT, real wrath of God type stuff/Fire&brimstone falling from the skies!/ Rivers/seas boiling!/Forty years of darkness! Yet, still, people didn’t listen.

[We shouldn’t laugh/scoff: we don’t really listen either. The promise/prophecy is clear: Christ’s 1st advent was about a cradle/led to a Cross/crown of thorns. We celebrate this coming/Christmas but ignore the rest: His 2nd Advent/coming-also about wearing a crown/kingly/golden crown: Christ-King of Kings/Lord of lords! It’s this coming that will bring about the end-of-time! Problem is: like the 1st listeners of Daniel’s words, we choose press snooze and go on doing what we’re doing.]

Daniel, however, said then/says now, that we’re living in denial/time’s almost up: Christ’s return is near. Believers awake! You/we need a plan. And, then, Daniel lays it out – first by telling us that all those who’s names are found “written in the book” will “be delivered.” (Dan 12:1) History/world will not only end, it – everything: live/dead – will also be judged. (List/checked twice – but more than if you’ve been naughty or nice!) All of creation/you/me/us will appear before God/God’s judgment seat. But there’s hope – there’s grace – that, through faith/righteousness, our names are written in the book. What book? What Daniel refers to here is the Book of Life – in which God records our names. In the book of Revelation this book is called “the Lamb’s book of life” (Rev. 21:27). The Lamb is Jesus/born in Bethlehem/to be-with-us/live-as-us/die-for-us – to shed his blood for us/save us/use to write our names in His book, all to offer us God’s amazing grace.

[Luke/Christmas reading: Angels’ message – “to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.” The long-promised “DAY” has arrived! It’s happened! And, like the shepherds, woken up from their sleepy-preoccupation, we are called to arise/shine-wake up and respond!]

God – through Daniel – tells us He wants us to share our faith with others. Why? Because we can make a difference/save lives/those who otherwise would be lost. By doing this/being light for others to see/follow, some will “awake” to “everlasting life”/others to “shame/everlasting contempt.” (Dan 12:2) Just as God in/through Jesus came to be-with/light for us, we, in turn, are to go out and be-with/light for others: People living in the dark desperately need the light – and we are called to be that light! That’s why Daniel calls us to, “*shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.*” (Dan 12:3). That’s who/what we’re meant to be! We’re to reflect the light that comes from Christ: Like stars, we’re to pierce the darkness/reveal God’s glory/guide those lost/alone/in darkness so others can know God’s hope/peace/joy/love.

[Song: “Little light of mine”-posted articles about the history of this “American Anthem”/rose out of African-American Gospel music of the slavery/plantation South. It is a song of resilience/resistance/hope sung by a ‘people in darkness’, against despair, that one day, not only will salvation and freedom come, but that their little light will shine!]

And, this is what we’re called/created/saved to do! “*This little light of mine/I’m gonna let it shine/in the Neighbourhood/point to heaven*” / “*shine like stars forever/ever*” And, we’re to do this because we all know people lost in the dark—especially this time of year/this year! Daniel/Jesus says we are to do for those who are in the dark/suffering what God/Jesus who “*called us out of darkness and into his marvelous light!*” (1 Peter 2:9)/did for us: we’re to “*bring them to righteousness*”/into the light.(Dan 12:3). Whatever your darkness – God calls you to shine/God gave you the light (it’s in you to shine), so let it out/shine! And, if we do, we will shine “*like the stars forever and ever*”/ “*like the sun*” – for eternity/as the eternal light of God’s love against the darkness. Amen.