

December 11, 2022
The Darkness of Night
Isaiah 35:1-10
The Rt. Rev. Dr. Bonnie A. Perry

May the God...

Good Morning!

Sometimes, particularly this time of year, I find myself lost in the darkness of night. Missing out on the solace of sleep. Wandering around past midnight trying to think deep thoughts, but instead reduced to replaying everything from that day. Why did I say that? When will I get that done? Am I good enough? Did I remember about God today, or just go through the day, meeting to meeting, call to call, event to activity, looking at only what's in front of me and next to come and completely overlooking God's blowing spirit? Now it's 3:00 in the morning and I have no good answers and even fewer hours of possible sleep left. Does this ever happen to you? Do you ever feel this way?

It isn't the easiest of times, right now. Everyone I know is tired. And the world—the world is in a difficult place—a savage war in Ukraine, echoes of that war reverberating in the global economy. What about our country: will democracy hold? Will we as a people of these United States continue to petition ourselves into pools of polarities? Or will we begin to listen and hear and learn? Will those of us who happen to have white skin tire of naming and dismantling systems and structures that make it decidedly harder for people with black and brown skins to be educated, respected, and be safe? Will all of us, will we summon enough energy to tear down and consign these dire systems to dung heaps or will we claim we have done enough and let the sinful systems continue to simmer in our institutions, communities, and families? Here in Michigan, will we once and for all have the energy to sensibly alter our laws to save our children from being harmed or killed by misused guns?

Sometimes, particularly this time of year I find myself lost in the darkness of night, overwhelmed with shadows of fear and longing for the coming of light.

I am not the first person; this is not the only time for a people to be longing for a change.

In the 7th century before the Common Era the prophet Isaiah said, to a people about to be overrun by a foreign empire, on the verge of exile

The prophet Isaiah proclaimed and prophesied that,

"The wilderness and dry land shall be glad, the dessert shall blossom and bloom...A highway shall be there and it shall be called the Holy Way...it shall be for God's people; no traveler, not even the fools shall go astray." (Isaiah 35: 1a, 8b)

And lo it came to be. A way home for the people in exile, people who thought they had been forsaken by our God in a foreign land, were ushered back to their city on a hill. They began slowly to rebuild and renew and relearn what it meant as Isaiah said,

*To come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy upon their heads,
They shall obtain joy and gladness and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.
(Isaiah 35:10)*

And in the days before the Birth of Christ when the people again were oppressed by another foreign power, Mary of Nazareth, Mary of Nazareth proclaims to her elderly relative Elizabeth,

"I rejoice in God my savior, he has looked with favor upon me, For God shows mercy to everyone who, from one generation to the next who honors him as God. God has shown strength and scattered those with arrogant thoughts and proud inclinations, pulled the powerful down from their thrones and lifted up the lowly, he has filled the hungry with good things...he has come to the aid of his servant Israel..." (Luke 1:48-51, 53-54a)

Mary, says all of this, as a young, unmarried pregnant woman to an elderly relative who also finds herself with child, Mary utters these words as if it has already happened. Biblical theologian Amy-Jill Levine says that these words are, "Not a Gospel of gain, but a Gospel of trust." (P.77 *Light of the World: A Beginner's Guide to Advent*)

Says Levine, Mary speaks as if these events have already happened...[and] says Levine they have, we see this new reality whenever those of us who have, give to those of us who need, we see this fidelity to the Torah and in faithfulness to [the] Gospel. We see these miracles because as God's children, it is our responsibility to carry them out.

(Summarizing P77)

In this time of dark nights and fractured souls, joy comes in the morning. Hope and new life come when we understand God's call, God's beckoning us to move beyond our fear and through our sadness, to understand that we are not and never have been in this on our own.

Says, Isaiah,

*"Strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees.
Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, do not fear!
Here is your God. He will come with vengeance... he will come and save you.*

Amen.