

The Light of Justice Breaks Forth Across the Morning Dawn

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- [Isaiah 58:1-9a \[9b-12\]](#)
- The fast God chooses
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- Light shines in the darkness for the upright. (Ps. 112:4)
- [Matthew 5:13-20](#)
- The teaching of Christ: salt and light

Barrow Alaska, the northernmost town in the United States, finally has some daylight. Barrow has a new name. Actually, a new old name—Utqiagvik (pronounced UUT-kee-AH-vik), which is the town's original Native American name. A couple of weeks ago dawn broke forth in Barrow for the first time in two months. From end of November to end of January, Barrow goes through two months of night, where the dawn never breaks. The sun lies tantalizingly just below the horizon for a couple of hours each day, but morning never breaks out over the southern landscape. The stars cast light through the evening, along with the moon and the northern lights, but night and darkness prevail for two months. People will call the police just to ask for the time. Imagine what it must be like to read the opening verses of Genesis in the prevalent darkness of Barrow's winter: "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep..." Imagine reading the verse and stopping there in the darkness and letting the verse linger incomplete. "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the waters." Frozen waters lie north of Barrow, a coastal town that actually had to move because of rising sea levels. And "the wind" is the Hebrew *Ruach*, which could mean wind or breath or spirit. "A breath from God swept over the waters."

The sun returned to Barrow this year on January 23 at 1:10 PM. Just imagine having lived through two months of night, and for two months you have just left the opening verse of Genesis incomplete with the breath of God hanging over the frozen waters. Then on January 23 on the edge of the Arctic Circle, at 1:09 PM, a minute before dawn, you finish the quote, and the sun rises.

“In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while the breath of God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light, and there was light.” God creates light. “Let there be light.” God creates light and finally (finally) after two months of darkness in Barrow Alaska that sun rises and shows itself from over the horizon. I wonder how residents respond: relief, jubilation. God creates light.

Our Isaiah passage lives in the night of injustice with the darkness of poverty and nakedness and oppression that has lasted longer than two months. In this darkness God creates light by the words of Isaiah. The ministry that Isaiah describes takes place around God who creates light.

Isaiah Chapter 58 starting at Verse 6:

Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?
Then, then your light shall break forth like the dawn.
and your healing shall spring up quickly(.) (Isaiah 58: 6-8)

God creates light, and we tend to think about His created light in terms of the stars and the sun. The greater light of the sun and the lesser light of the moon to guide the night. Isaiah expands this metaphor of creation and light to breaking the bonds of injustice. Clothing the vulnerable and the naked becomes a point of light like a star in the sky. Housing the homeless, another star in the sky, every shelter is a star breaking down the darkness. Sharing your bread with the hungry becomes a point of light like a star in the sky. Not just a single solitary dot lost in the vastness of the night sky, but a thousand, hundred thousand, million points of light, shining forth justice and hope so that the darkness does not overwhelm like an unending Barrow winter’s night. God creates light in our ministry that cuts through the darkness of poverty and hunger and homelessness. Isaiah gives us this metaphor of light,

justice and hope. This is God's metaphor not mine, entrusted to the scripture to enlighten our lives.

Jesus in our gospel lesson reminds you that the light already shines in you.

“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. **15** No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. **16** In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”
(Matthew 5: 14-16)

God created the light in you when God formed you in the womb. Jesus sees that light in you, and his ministry becomes a ministry of revelation. Jesus helps you to see your own light and to let it shine for others to see.

Perhaps you might remember President George H. W. Bush sworn into the presidency in January of 1989. His inauguration included a proclamation called “a thousand points of light.”

“I have spoken of a thousand points of light, of all the community organizations that are spread like stars throughout the Nation, doing good. We will work hand in hand, encouraging, sometimes leading, sometimes being led, rewarding.”

During his four years as president, the White House acknowledged a thousand points of light in our nation—individuals and organizations that sought to use their gifts to improve the lives of the oppressed and vulnerable. Today, the foundation President Bush started continues to reveal a daily point of light in an individual volunteer who serves his or her community. Jason Farmer recently received the daily commendation for his volunteer efforts with St. Jude's hospital. He benefitted as a toddler from a St. Jude's childhood assistance program. For nearly fifty years, Farmer has stayed connected as a volunteer to St. Jude's in Memphis Tennessee. Most recently, in the last couple of years, he began an event during African-American history month to celebrate the support of St. Jude's African-American volunteers.

Meghan Chen, another recent Point of Light recipient, started an urban garden initiative in her home city. She explored the challenge of cities becoming food deserts, where people lack access to fresh food. After studying the problem, she started a container gardening program where she goes to schools and teaches

students how to grow vegetables in containers that can sit out on porches or in sparse backyards that lack fresh soil.

Then your light shall break forth like the dawn.

[[then your light shall break forth like the dawn in Barrow Alaska]]

and your healing shall spring up quickly. (Isaiah 58: 8, with added metaphor)

The Virginia Synod has a “Do Justice” newsletter and blog that lifts up similar points of light in our commonwealth. They recently lifted up a day of advocacy, January 22, where faith leaders across denominations and faith traditions all gathered in Richmond to hear about social justice concerns and meet with lawmakers to advocate justice “For All People.”

The newsletter also provided information about FeedVA, a statewide information database about hunger and health issues. They have a map of all food pantries available in the commonwealth as well as the regional service maps for the six food banks the support hunger initiatives in Virginia.

The season after Epiphany celebrates God who creates light and reveals light in this time of year where the days grow longer and night diminishes. Days finally feel like they are stretching out longer—more sunlight and less darkness. At the same time, in the spirit of Isaiah, we strive for more justice and less darkness. This morning’s scripture uses the visual of light breaking forth from the darkness as a visual description for justice breaking into the world and that light shines in each of you. Jesus sees you and blesses you as a light of hope and a light of ministry. Praise God.

Amen