

**Service of Lessons and Carols**  
**First Congregational UCC, Eagle River**  
**December 24, 2020**

L. Gail Irwin, Interim Pastor

Readers: Linda and Jim Sanborn, Lori Hunter

Vocal Quartet: Lori Hunter, Tobi Johannsen, Bernie Hupperts, Bill Morgan

Accompanists: Norma Yaeger, Linda Brainard, Lori Hunter

**Christmas Reflection**

- I. The poem from Isaiah 9 alludes to walking in darkness but seeing light;
  - a. It weaves through references to deep darkness, burdens, the rod of the oppressor, warriors and blood;
    - i. Our biblical ancestors were acquainted with slavery, oppression and war;
  - b. But the poem goes on to reference light and joy; the end of war, and the coming of a child who will rule with authority, as a Wonderful Counselor, a Prince of Peace.
    - i. And this Messiah is not written about as someone who will come in the future, but as someone who has already been born, already named, already here among us.
    - ii. This poem sits on the precipice between fear and hope;
    - iii. Summed up in the Christmas hymn: “O Little Town of Bethlehem”:
      1. *The hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee tonight...*
- II. We all prefer the Hope part of Christmas!
  - a. We prefer light to darkness; light candles, build fires, string up Christmas lights everywhere, maybe even more this year!
  - b. But it wouldn't be honest to treat Christmas as only a time of rejoicing;
  - c. especially this year, we need to acknowledge that for many people, this has been a year of loss and grief, illness, uncertainty, even death;
    - i. Spiritually, Christians move through fear and even terror in the Advent season;
    - ii. we hear that fear addressed by angels who visited Zechariah and Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph and shepherds;
    - iii. But as we move through the fear, we encounter new revelations;
    - iv. even in the darkness, our eyes adjust and we see new things
- III. This year, we've had to move through our own fearful experiences and we've encountered new revelations;
  - i. The realization that our nation is still infected by long simmering racism;
  - ii. The realization that our democracy is fragile, and needs all of us to believe in it and trust each other to uphold it;
  - iii. The pandemic has revealed that we are all vulnerable to disease, young and old, but that some are more vulnerable than others because of poverty, access to health care, the type of work we do, or the color of our skin;

- iv. Here in your own church, you found yourself vulnerable after losing your pastor, without really understanding what happened or why.
  - v. In short, we resourceful humans have realized there are some things we are not in complete control of; and that is terrifying!
  
- IV. But for Christians, acknowledging our vulnerability should not cause us to become hopeless!
  - a. We can use times of vulnerability to turn back and acknowledge God's power, so much bigger than our own.
  - b. This year has shown us that we cannot save ourselves from every danger; we need a living and loving God to protect us and to help us protect each other;
  
- V. So God has empowered us every day:
  - i. Through people like Mary and the leaders of the Black Lives Matter movement, who bravely speak truth to power
  - ii. Through healers like Jesus, and all those health care workers God has empowered to heal and comfort the sick this year
  - iii. Through wise men and women, developing therapies and vaccines to restore health around the world, pursuing that elusive star the rest of us couldn't see, but they could!
  - iv. Like ordinary people around the world, sacrificing their own safety to bring sustenance and joy to people whose needs are greater;
  - v. So many angels have risen up this year to remind us: *Be not afraid!*
  - vi. We have a powerful God, a Wonderful Counselor, a Prince of Peace that will bring this world out of crisis better than we entered it.
  
- VI. Like the prophet Isaiah, we sit on the precipice between fear and hope;
  - a. Our faith compels us to lean toward hope in times like these!
  - b. To turn away from cynicism, greed and self-protection, and turn toward the light;
  - c. Take a quiet moment to look at the light! God is here tonight! *Emmanuel! God with us.* We don't have to wait and wonder if God is coming to save us. God is already here, already saving us and equipping us to save each other from the darkness, which is already receding!