

## **ARISING AND SHINING IN THE NEW YEAR**

**(Reflection by Rev. Peggy McDonagh, January 12, 2020)**

This past Wednesday, I was listening to the David Gray morning show on CBC. On Wednesday mornings, he has a conversation with the Unconventional Panel, a panel comprised of three people with different professions. Each week a topic is chosen for the panel to discuss, and this week the theme was hope. David invited them to talk about what they were hopeful for moving into a new year.

One person spoke about not leaving the future of our world, country, and city in the hands of politicians but taking personal responsibility for our future. Another talked about finding the energy within to be creative, passionate, and motivated to try new things and get involved. The third person reminded us that who we are as a country today is not who we were five or ten years ago, and that we must find new pathways that lead us toward success.

As I listened, I was struck by the excitement, energy, and positivity of their conversation. The discussion seemed quite fitting for the Epiphany season because it seemed to me that the panel was encouraging people to shine their own light of hope and energy into the New Year.

Like the panel, the Hebrew prophet Isaiah urged the Hebrews to rise and shine, to raise their eyes and look outward. Despite the doom and gloom of the times, he consistently talked about having hope in God's ability to remake the fractured world. This prophetic text invites us to consider what it means to shine in our own fractured and complicated lives.

Jesus saw much doom and gloom in his world, yet he too encouraged people to let their inner divine light shine, and I believe that he wanted the divine light of compassion to shine from their hearts. When our divine light is freed to shine, we can create a more meaningful life for ourselves and the world even in its complicated and fractured state.

For us to shine in the world, we must start by examining ourselves to see if we are shining in our own individual lives. As the Dala Lama said, for there to be peace in the world, there must be peace in our hearts.

In a letter to her daughter, who had just left home to attend college, a mother sent her version of Matthew 5:14-16. "You are the light of the world. People do not light a candle and then put it under a basket; rather, they set it in a candle holder.

In the same way, dear daughter, let your light shine before all people. Resolve to shine – shine from the depths of your humanity. Do not hide your light under a basket. Do not hide your authenticity by trying to be ‘cool, or successful, or getting the best marks, being fashionable, or liked. Resolve to shine – people will move toward you because your light will illuminate your truth and goodness.”

Within each of us there exists a beautiful, authentic light. Sometimes we hide this light under baskets of distrust, hatred, anger, fear, and false identities. Some people hide their light under baskets of needing to be accepted, loved, slim, smart, or beautiful, while others hide under baskets of self-hatred and needing to control others. There are a variety of reasons for hiding our light.

Many years ago, a counselor asked me, “When you walk into a room, what are you trying to be?” In the first half of my life, when I walked into a room, I was trying to be liked, accepted, and valued. I was a person who wore many masks to cover insecurity and fear and I was afraid to shine the light of my sacred self, to be authentic.

After many years of intentional self-reflection, I can now walk into a room and shine with no desire to be someone other than my sacred self. It takes courage to raise our eyes and look at ourselves with honesty and remove the baskets so we can shine.

But when we dare to remove the baskets and resolve to shine, our spiritual well-being is enhanced. We discover new possibilities for ourselves and we change negative attitudes. We improve our relationships and identify new pathways to travel. All of this enables us to live with greater peace and compassion, and in so doing, begin to release that energy and positivity to help restore the world and make it a safer and more peaceful place.

This morning I invite you to reflect upon your own life and think about what basket you might need to remove so that your light can shine in this New Year. Melody Bettie, in her book, *The Language of Letting Go*, provides some helpful questions to ask ourselves.

What would you like to experience in your life? What would you like to do, to accomplish? Is there something positive you would like to attract into your life? What areas of growth would you like to experience? What blocks, or character defects, would you like to have removed? What might you need to do to enhance family and friend relationships? What problems would you like to see resolved? What decisions would you like to make?”

On the paper candle given to you this morning, write down one intention you would like to commit to so that your inner light will shine more

brightly this year. Writing down a goal is an affirmation that you're interested in living life fully. (Give people time to do this).

If you are willing, find someone in the congregation to give your candle to. This should be someone who will be intentional about checking in with you to see how you are doing. You may wish to give it to someone outside the congregation.

I've asked Colin Outtrim, chair of the EDGE committee, to share with us a few encouraging words on how we, as a congregation, can shine with hope and trust this year.

### **Concluding Words:**

I conclude with a quote by Rev. Carolyn Baskin-Bell, senior pastor of the Second African Methodist Episcopal church in Los Angeles. She writes, "Arise and shine! Illuminate the light that influences sadness to joy, hate to love, confusion to peace and doubt to hope. Arise, and illuminate the light that overpowers darkness. Let our lights shine, illumine intentionally to influence one another to walk in the beautiful light of God!"