

Dusk or Dawn
Epiphany Sunday
January 6, 2013
Gordon Wiersma

Texts: Isaiah 60 & Matthew 2

If you'd like the condensed version of this sermon, you can simply read the poem in the bulletin printed for the prayer for blessing. It's a poem I wrote a while ago now, and although I don't claim it to be a poetic gem, it's one that has stuck with me – it's one of the handful of poems I have taped onto my desk in my office, so clearly it holds some meaning for me. It's got a bit of gimmick to it: 'is it dusk or dawn? yes, it is...' – answering an 'either/or' with a 'yes' impresses myself with some sense of cleverness and irony. But I've realized that perhaps the idea of 'is it dusk or dawn?' comes in part from a strong childhood memory that I have. I was about 10-years old, and on a family vacation out East, it turned out we had a through-the-night drive with my Mom at the wheel and me as "navigator" - a great kid memory: riding shotgun navigator through the night...a very important job! We happened to be driving east, so out of the dark we could watch the whole sunrise develop and dawn into the new day. I hadn't paid attention to many

sunrises – we’re more sunset people here in western Michigan – so I still remember observing with my Mom that the sunrise looked very much like a sunset...dawn and dusk, sunrise and sunset can look very much the same. Now maybe that seems obvious to you, but we were pretty tired and it seemed an insight at the time...and if not a profound scientific thought, it can have some theological imagery and implications that I think are worth reflecting on. ‘Is it dusk or dawn?’ as an image of life, of faith...how would we respond...? – When we look within and around us, can we tell the difference?

Part of our identity as people of faith is that we are people of the light – light is an image of God, of truth, of hope – Jesus Christ is the light of the world; we are the light of the world – light, light, light...is good. And it’s an image to fit this day very well – in the calendar year, the first Sunday of the New Year, a new year dawns, always celebrated as a symbol of hope and expectation; in the liturgical calendar, the festival of Epiphany – the capstone celebration of the 12 days of Christmas – not just the story of the magi, but the acclamation of God’s gift in Christ bringing light to the whole world. Light, light,

light...that's what you'll find in these passages, proclaiming our identity as people of the light.

But...how do we hold that image if we are really to describe our lives? – Our world, ourselves? In the reality we live in, light and darkness, dawn and dusk, are very much mingled together. If you'd take a picture of the world, a snapshot of our lives- could you tell if it was sunrise or sunset? - If light is increasing or diminishing, if hopes are shining or fading? Darkness is never hard to find: we confess it is present in us, in our hearts and minds, things that are hurtful and harmful; and brokenness too in us that is done to us or comes at us, the darkness of suffering and diminishment. It can be our experience that darkness feels to be gathering, deepening in us. And certainly it's never difficult to find darkness around us in the injustice and violence of this world - sometimes it appears to be a thickening cloud of darkness.

Yes, there is light too- but clearly our lives are darkness and light mixed together...is it dusk or dawn? It can be hard to tell the difference. So in that reality, here's what these passages do - they are a word that call us to make a statement of faith, that goes something like this: our

lives are found not in dusk, but in dawn- held not by a reality that is darkness, but embraced by the light of God's kingdom.

That is a statement of faith- a word from God in us- that impacts deeply how we see ourselves and our world. If we think of how the prophet Isaiah speaks- he talks to a people who know both darkness and light, and his image holds the two together- "to people in darkness...a light rises"- and the image leads to proclaiming God as an everlasting light- an eternal dawn. The light of God which brings salvation, the restoration of all that is broken - that is the word that surrounds our lives. I think that image of light is used so often in Scripture because it expresses so vividly the reality and power of God's presence in a world of darkness. God's light is a picture of grace, really- grace which is the truth that in every circumstance God's presence and purpose can be found, that God provides a way for us. It might sound like using the image of dawn means that things should always be getting better and better for us- but this image is no guarantee of that- instead it is an image which describes again and again what faith is: turning and seeing that God's light is present to us- that God is making new what is broken. So

a life of faith is to grow in our trust of that grace, receiving the dawn of God's light into our lives.

The story of the magi embodies the same sense of light and darkness present together. The wise men respond to the star in the wisdom that God's light is needed for a world full of darkness – and in the Christ child they recognize and worship God's light of life. Yet there is deep darkness in this story too- what follows after the wisemen leave is the story of how King Herod is intent on destroying this new king- Herod kills as many children as he can in hopes that he will kill the king these wise men seek. It's a dark story- a picture of a world of violence in so many ways, then and now. That's the world where the story of Christ happens- and it is for such darkness that God's light has come.

Dusk and dawn, light and darkness are always together - so the life faith is an act of the heart and mind to always seek and look for the light; at times to know and other times too long for the light of Christ's graceful presence in our lives. Sometimes the evidence makes it hard to believe it is dawn rather than dusk- sometimes the darkness is very

strong. But our faith isn't about the evidence of a particular moment or day or week or month or year or millennium- it is holding to the promise that God's light is there, always, even when it's hard to see. And in claiming that reality, it becomes our reality- the dawn of God's grace is God's saving power always breaking into new horizons, always present and possible.

Light, light, light...but did you notice that Isaiah spoke not only of the light of God's glory, but also of the glory of God's light shining from God's people?- faith that claims the dawn of grace is one that reflects that light to the world- God's light given to us is reflected together by us to the darkness; it is reflected to suffering as compassion, to immorality as integrity, to injustice as justice, to hatred as love, to violence as peace, to indifference as commitment. Epiphany is something we are called to be a part of- being God's light in Christ for all.

And you don't have to drive through the night to figure this out- just make your way through any old day: the darkness is there and so is the light. Looking for the dawn is an act of faith- knowing Christ is present in the darkness and giving true light; it is with such faith that we

will receive and share the light of God's grace with the dawn of each day God gives to us. AMEN.

PRAYER FOR BLESSING *Dusk or Dawn*

*is it dusk or dawn?
yes, it is.*

*dusk and dawn
are contained in every moment, as are my
hopes and fears, faith and doubts,
love and hate, joy and sadness.*

*dusk and dawn,
in and between them all things are present.*

*is God in dusk or in dawn?
yes, God is.
present
in and between
all moments.*

Gordon Wiersma, February 2006