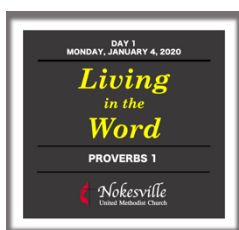


Nokesville UMC Sunday Worship
 January 3, 2021
 Rev. YoungMin Kim

Arise and Shine in 2021
 Isaiah 60:1-6

(1)

Before I give the sermon, I want to share my first ministry project that God showed me during the week. Since the breakout of the pandemic, we have met each other either online or offline just once a week... once a week. Once a week is not enough in terms of faith growth and sharing, and caring for each other. So, I want to immediately start what I postponed last year. That is, I want to begin with a daily devotion, named **“Living in the Word.”** During the first month of the new year, we will read each chapter of the Book of Proverbs for 31 days and share short reflections with you. Every morning at 6am, I will post the daily devotion video clip on both the church Facebook page and website (www.nokesvilleumc.com). If your circumstances allow, please start each day with the Word of God by joining the devotion with me. If you are unable to join me, you can access the video anytime when you are free—during your lunch time or before you go to bed. The first Daily Devotion will start tomorrow. I hope we will be spiritually connected together through the daily devotion in January.



I spent my elementary school years in the mid and late 1980s. In my understanding, a watch runs with a battery. One day, one of my friends showed me his new watch. It looked somewhat different from other ordinary watches. On the top section of the face, there was a rectangle with grids; and the bottom section showed hours, minutes, and seconds. What surprised me is that my friend said his watch did not run with a battery. It ran with solar light. Yes, the rectangle with grids was a solar panel. I believe you have had such a solar watch at least once. The longer the watch is exposed to the sunlight, the longer it operates.



(2)

According to the Lectionary schedule in the new year, we read Isaiah 60:1-6. In order to understand today’s passage, let me briefly explain the context of chapter 60. The kingdom of Israel (or the so-called Northern Israel) was fallen by Assyria in 722 BC. And then, Assyria attacked the kingdom of Judah (or the so-called Southern Judah), and Judah was not fallen but became devastated throughout the nation. The prophet Isaiah, who served the kingdom of Judah between 745 BC and 695 BC, witnessed all the procedures and their aftermath. And he spoke for God to the kingdom of Judah and the Judaeans that God’s punishment would come due to their unfaithfulness. Nevertheless, Israel would eventually be saved by God and become the priestly nation for God’s world.

What happened to the kingdom of Judah in reality? The kingdom of Judah was fallen by Babylon in 586 BC, and most Judeans were deported to Babylon. And the Babylonian Exile lasted for about 50 years till

Babylon was fallen by Persia, and King Cyrus of Persia allowed all Israelite captives to return to Jerusalem. They might have been pleased when they heard about returning to their motherland. On the way to Jerusalem, they might have been full of joy, hopes, and dreams. However, they immediately became despondent when they returned to Jerusalem in 536 BC and saw Jerusalem devastated and deserted. With Zerubbabel, Joshua, Nehemiah, and others as the leaders, the returning Israelites began to rebuild the Jerusalem Temple first because it symbolized the presence of God. Yet, as soon as they began to rebuild, they faced opposition by neighboring countries as well as financial difficulties, so the temple rebuilding project was suspended for 14 years. But God encouraged the Israelites through the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, and finally the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple was completed in 516 BC. Before the Jerusalem Temple, they might have been deeply moved, and many images came and went in their minds: being attacked and fallen, deportation to Babylon and captivity on foreign soil, physical and mental oppression, discrimination, starvation, many others, and their way back to Zion. And then today's Scripture is connected.

Verses 1-3 say, "[Jerusalem] Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth and thick darkness the people; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn." God called Jerusalem to arise and shine. Jerusalem was no longer a picture of failure, devastation, neglect, and darkness. It was now a light to shine God's world because God first shined His light upon Jerusalem and the Israelites, and each one is a light to cover failure, devastation, neglect, and darkness. They were exposed to and absorbed God's light and glory first, so they could shine God's light and glory to the world. The more and the longer they were exposed to it and absorbed it, the more and the longer they persist to shine to the world...just like a solar watch.

(3)

Most people agree with me that the year of 2020 was like the darkness of midwinter. Our days were short and nights were extremely long. And the darkness at night came to us in the form of fear, anxiety, stress, anger, injustice, hatred, loss, prejudice, poverty, separation, and many others that affected us in our everyday lives. Thus, many people want to delete the year of 2020 from their memories.

However, in the passage, light breaks through the darkness, and the prophet Isaiah calls us to arise and shine the light of peace, joy, and reconciliation. And we can do this because God's light and glory has first risen upon us, so we absorb the light and glory of God and give light and glory back to those who do not have them yet—those who remain in darkness. Regardless of whether we recognize it or not, God keeps shining His light and glory upon us. We do not know what will happen in 2021. We do not know how the COVID situation will develop. But we should not remain in darkness in the form of a negative, pessimistic, or sarcastic stance. We who are exposed to God's light and glory in the past, present, and future clear away the darkness and shine around the world with the light and glory of God. You, people of God! Arise and shine in 2021. Amen.