

Stargazing
A Sermon for Sardis Baptist Church
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Isaiah 2:1-5
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Some twenty-eight hundred years ago, the prophet Isaiah gazed upon a night sky, not too different from ours. As a matter of fact, many of the stars we gaze at today were the very same ones that caught his gaze.

This morning, I imagine our prophet. He's resting. Nighttime has fallen. The light of the stars and the glow of the moon have replaced the tortuous brightness and heat of the noonday sun. And just for a moment, the world is stilled. The Assyrian war drums have stopped their pounding; the sieging soldiers are enjoying their nightly furlough. And gone is the incessant noise – the preparations of both initiating and repelling a siege; the constant chattering of strategy; the weeping of the anxious; the I-told-you-SOs of advisors with hindsight; the clanking, pinging, deafening, frightening, annoyingly-present melodies and harmonies of smiths pounding their metals into instruments of war.

It's a familiar history. The kingdoms of humanity engaged in a frenzy, all in the hopes of asserting some lasting realm of power, a place where a clear division is carved out: the powerful and the powerless. And when you're in the middle of such a frenzy, it's hard to believe there's ever gonna be a day when all of this violence, all of this chaos is gonna be turned into a place of rest, a place of peace, a place representing all of God's good purposes.

Thank God for stars. Because when we gaze at the stars, we are reminded, like the prophet, that we walk in God's light. We literally walk in God's light. And God's light can transform everything we know into something beautiful, something peaceful, something worthy, something illumined, something divine.

Because here's the truth. Isaiah was living in a violent time, a restless time, a chaotic time. But such violence, such restlessness, such chaos is nothing compared to a star. Seriously, I think we would be hard-pressed to find anything with more commotion than a star. It's a big gigantic ball of helium and hydrogen, held together by gravity, with a fusion nuclear reaction at its core (that's what

balances out the gravity), and it produces these massive amounts of heat. Imagine a pot of water that you boil on the stove. When it gets hot, you see all those bubbles moving around furiously. There are hisses and pings and pops, and if you stand close enough you can feel the heat it radiates. The angry liquid can make noodles become limp, and eggs soften, and ice melt in a matter of seconds.

Now imagine a pot of water a hundred times bigger than the earth. And instead of H₂O it's HHe and there's a whole lot of it!!!

And yet we have a Creator, who somehow, someway fashions all of that violence, all of that frenzy, all of that heat into a bright and peaceful light. And somehow, someway all of that chaotic, conflicted energy makes its way through space and time to us, not as a flaming, mean-spirited, destructive ball of fire, but as a sign to say, "God's bigger than this, y'all."

I mean really, think about it. There is such a beautiful irony. Isaiah, in the midst of conflict and violence, looks up into the heavens filled with conflict and violence, and God says:

Here's what I can do!!! I can bring stillness. I can bring peace. I can bring continuity. And no matter who you are, no matter where you are, and most importantly, no matter WHEN you are, you can look to my light to see evidence of such a claim. For the stars are my work.

My imagination keeps growing. Scientists, or at least a few I found on the Internet, believe that the stars make noises. They are actually vibrating all the time. The gases rise up and down from a star's core, and it's kind of like beating on a hollow drum. There are high notes, and low notes, and little tap-tap-taps, and gigantic bang-bang-bangs. Of course, the stars are millions upon millions upon millions of miles away so we can't hear them, yet, at least. We just have to imagine they sound as pretty as they look.

But I was thinking, what if the stars could see and hear us, too?!? What if every night, their little molecules, the citizens of these domains, had just a moment of rest, too. And as their mamas and daddies tucked them into bed, they looked below to be inspired by sounds and visions of peace.

If Isaiah's right, and I believe he is, those swords are gonna be transformed into plowshares and those spears are gonna be transformed into pruning hooks. That's a poetic way of saying that all of the instruments on earth that are being weaponized to wield power and domination, are going to one day be redirected and reimagined to become tools for building a beloved community. It means our busyness, our racket, our chaos is evolving away from destruction and toward harmony.

There's an old wives tale that the stars are so far away from us, that what we look at is the light of something that has long ago burned out. Modern science has disproven this, but I'm gonna use the image anyway. The idea is that the stars are telling us of a history that has already happened. Therefore, if the stars are looking upon us, and it takes just as long for them to see us as us them, what the stars are gonna see is our future. The stars get to see the plowshares and pruning hooks. And the sounds they'll hear are not the frenzied clanking of those spears and swords being flattened and reshaped, but instead the sweet melodies of villages that feed neighbors, cities that celebrate diversity, communities that walk in God's way, a world that no longer has use for instruments of war and manipulation.

Here on Earth, we look high to see the stars, evidence of all that God can do. And high up in the sky, the stars stare down, wondering if somebody, anybody will return their glory.

The prophet tells us that one day soon, the world's gonna be as God intends. God's house is gonna be raised on the highest mountain, and God's people are gonna flock to it, and God's ways, not Caesar's ways, are gonna be followed. And we will no longer be blinded by such light, but rather we will choose to walk in it.

This Sunday, the Sunday of Hope, tells us that such a process, the raising of that mountain, the turning toward that light, the transformation of this world into God's world, is about to begin.

So let's pause. Let's look upward to the stars. And let's see what God is doing. God is making us a light to the stars, as the stars have been a light to us.

Star light, star bright, first light I see tonight. I wish I may, I wish I might, have this wish I wish tonight!

With hope, we ask that it may be so, and that it might be soon. Amen.