

**“Let Our Light Shine”****Isaiah 60:1-6; Matthew 2: 1-12***“Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of God has risen upon you.”**Isaiah 60:1*

A Sermon Preached by Catherine Foote  
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Mary Kollar is a member of our congregation who reads, writes and shares poetry. You may have read about her in the Seattle Times a couple of months back. She is the woman on Capitol Hill who puts out a “poem of the month.” You can talk to her some time about how she started this- it’s a great story. But what it has evolved into now is a regular parade of neighbors and strangers who come by at the first of the month, every month, to pick up a copy of whatever poem Mary has placed out at her gate for them.

Mary knows that poetry feeds the soul- and isn’t it a gift that she has been feeding folks in her neighborhood so generously and so faithfully for so long? And now she has started bringing her monthly poems to the Tuesday morning Bible Study group at this church as well. So at the first of each month we know our souls will be fed by Mary’s spiritual practice.

I say all that because I want to put in context this poem of Mary’s for today. This is her Christmas poem- and although she doesn’t write most of the poems she puts out in her poetry box, she does write her Christmas poems. And as soon as she read this one to our Tuesday morning group, I knew I wanted to read it to you all this morning. Listen to these words:

In midwinter,  
 It is not from where the light comes,  
 But where it stays - -  
 A peach patina on the bay,  
 The chilliest pool  
 That mirrors alders dappled gray.

It is all about the stripping away  
 In salvaged light too soft to blind.  
 Winter distills to afterglow,  
 A flush of wings between branches  
 Silhouetted against the drifting snow.

This is the phrase that so captured me: “In midwinter, it is not from where the light comes but where it stays.”

Our two texts this morning are texts of light, because this is Epiphany Sunday, the Sunday of light. An epiphany is literally an appearance, and so Epiphany as a celebration of the church remembers the appearance of the star, and ultimately of Jesus to the Magi.

But epiphany has also come to mean for all of us an insight, a sudden awareness of truth, an opening of the soul.

“In midwinter, it is not from where the light comes, but where it stays.”

Mary’s poem articulates this reality- the light is around me, around us all the time. Our job is not to generate the light (even though we sing “This little light of mine”); our job is to open ourselves to the light. Our task is to notice and then to attend to where the light stays.

“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you” says the prophet Isaiah to a community in exile. “You who were sitting in the darkness of despair, see know that God’s light is here. Wake up, and be on with the business of living in the light.”

We do not create the sunrise, but we are invited to open ourselves to the morning.

Of course, such an opening is not easy. There is much in our world that encourages us to stay hidden in the shadows. But we gather here every week because in our best moments we know ourselves to be those on whom light has fallen. And even if you just arrived on the scene, like wise travelers from the east, we invite you into this space where we are making room for the light.

Now let me make something very clear. We do not assume we are the only ones on whom light has fallen. We in this place do not assume we know all the answers. In fact, we are more often clearer on the questions than we are on the answers. But we gather here every week because we have caught a glimpse of light, and that glimpse, we know, is worth pursuing.

Perhaps I can use the words of another “Mary” poet- so hear these words of Mary Oliver: “This is the first, wildest and wisest thing I know.” she says, “That the soul exists, and that it is built entirely out of attentiveness.”

We are here to pay attention. We have seen something worth pursuing, even if it was only a glimpse. We have experienced something that feels full of possibilities- full of hope and full of joy, full of love. But we are also people who know how hard it is to live authentically in this world. There is so much violence around us that it is hard for us to even remember the path of peace. There is so much invitation to greed that we do not trust gratitude to be enough. There is so much conditional acceptance around us that it is hard to hold on to the possibility of unconditional love.

But we are here to pay attention. We are here to let the light stay on us awhile. That is why we start our worship together with both praise, an affirmation of our faith, and with confession, an affirmation of our brokenness. It is why we remind ourselves that we live in the grace of God, which is full of both truth and mercy.

And we are here *in community*, because we know that although the journey of the soul will always ultimately be a very solitary one, we also know (as Parker Palmer says in his book *A Hidden Wholeness*) that the journey we are on is too tough to be made solo, the path is too deeply hidden to be traveled without company, and the destination is too daunting to be achieved alone. (Palmer, p 26).

We are people who have sat in darkness; indeed we still spend a lot of our time there. But there are moments, yes there are moments when the light falls on us. And “In midwinter, it is not from where the light comes but where it stays.” In this community I have seen moments when you have helped me connect to the deepest realities of existence, within myself, within the world, and I dare to say within God. And knowing that those moments have happened, that I have found a community in which I can be my truest self. What we are working to build here is a palace where, if even for just a moment, we lay aside every falsehood we have thought we had to adopt just to survive in this mixed up world.

We sing together here- because the music and the poetry of the words open us up. They invite us to go deeper into places of connection. Music has always offered strength for the journey.

We pray together here, because prayers as well open us to the light.

And we gather this morning also to offer food for this journey. There are so many broken places in our world and in ourselves. And so we gather at this table every month, to remind ourselves of who we long to be, who we are called to be- and to remind ourselves to take nourishment, food for our journey. We gather as well proclaiming this table an open one- food for any who would join us here.

Finally, on this particular morning, many of us are expressing our commitment to the continuation of that community by pledging to support it financially in the coming year.

Parker Palmer reminds us that all of us need places where we can be safe enough and courageous enough to face our brokenness and discover our wholeness. What he describes as “circles of trust,” we aim to offer here. Palmer says, “We need more and more circles from which we can return to the world less divided and more connected to our own souls.”

Or as Mary Kollar wrote- in the poem she titled by the way “Liturgical Space”:

It is all about the stripping away  
 In salvaged light too soft to blind.  
 Winter distills to afterglow,  
 A flush of wings between branches  
 Silhouetted against the drifting snow.