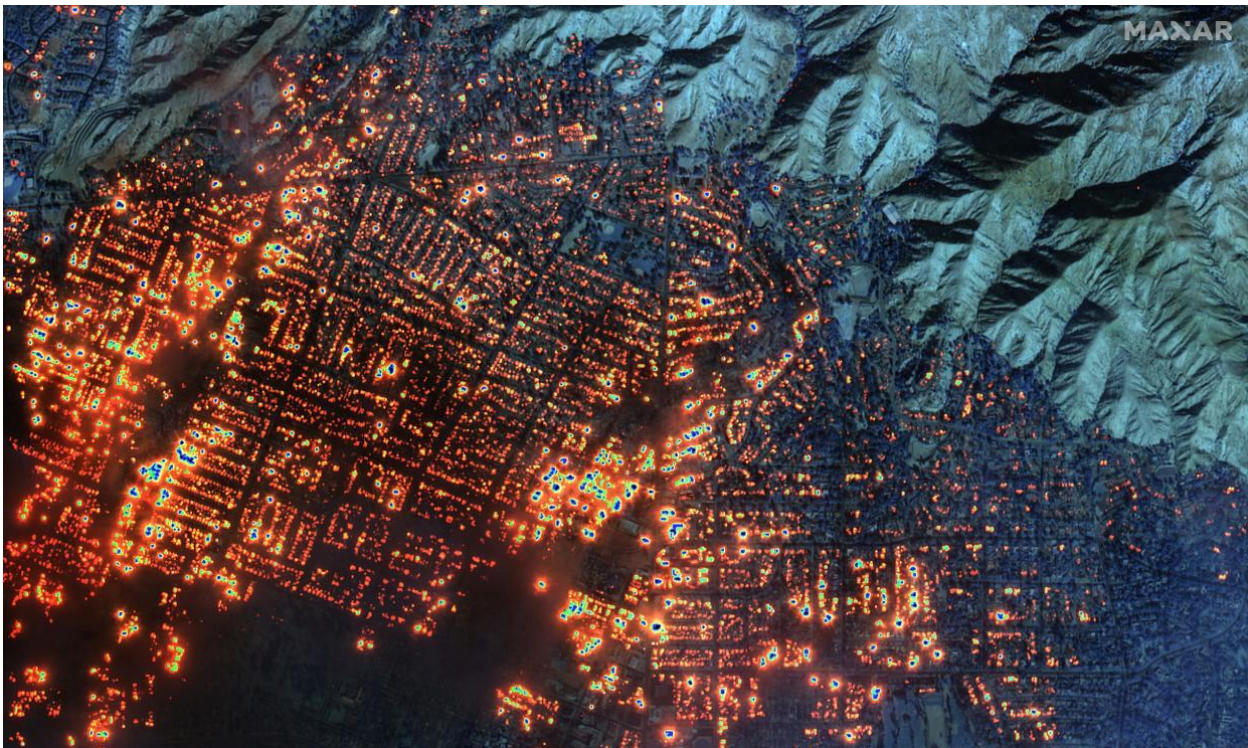


Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.
For darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the LORD will arise upon you,
and God's glory will appear over you. *Isaiah 60:1-2*

Darkness and Light

It was only a week ago when we celebrated Epiphany, the remembrance of Christ's star rising in the night. When I started to write this column by pulling up last week's column (of which I have absolutely no memory), I considered changing the lead Scripture passage, but I see that the passage is still relevant—it's just that some of us would put the accent on "darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples." But again, the thing about light is, it shines best in the midst of darkness.



This infrared image of Altadena on fire would be beautiful if it wasn't so horrifying.

Like so many others who lost their homes, I am still somewhat dazed, but I know that I have resources. I share the experience with others, trying to get the critical things handled, while also managing my responsibilities, especially with all of you. We are blessed to have staff who are sharing the lead, so for instance you'll see updates from Carrie Kohler, our Stated Clerk for Administration, and Wendy Gist is interfacing with PDA on resource support. The staff will also try to figure out the most expedient way to help with updated information, and ways to help folks stay connected and supported.

A few things I'm learning, as of Sunday afternoon:

- While many houses of worship in Altadena have burned (the Jewish temple, the Muslim masjid, and UCC, Episcopal, and Catholic churches), our Presbyterian churches, including First Presbyterian Altadena, Westminster, and Trinity, were not damaged.
- However, nearly all the churches in the area have multiple members who have lost their homes.

- Many friends and neighboring presbyteries have asked how they can help, so while they can certainly give to Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (<https://pcusa.org/donate/dr000165-us-wildfires>), if they want to give directly to the Presbytery, go to <https://sangabpres.org/donate/>. We will use those funds and funds that we receive from other parts of the PC(USA) to address pressing needs among our churches.
- Speaking of, we have sent out a form so we can assess those needs; anyone in our San Gabriel Presbytery family are invited to complete the form. Go to the [Fire Impact Google Doc](#), or email Carrie at statedclerk@sangabpres.org if you cannot fill out the form online. Many of our churches are also checking in with their members, so we will check in with each congregation.
- There are many resource websites. I have been overwhelmed by the huge number of websites and tasks that need to be done, but we'll get through it. We have a separate resource section in the MMU, and I expect that if something comes up midweek, we will send out more updates.

It has been amazing how COVID helped to prepare us for some of this, while there are significant differences, of course. But God will get us through again, while this crisis reminds us yet again of our fragile mortal state, and the blessing we have in God's gracious provisions. We will lean on the love of Jesus and the love of each other, as we are reminded that the most important things in life are not things.

This lesson has had to be learned for all of history. Fire is not, of course, new. In 1688 the poet Masahide Mizuta lost his home to fire, leading him to write a haiku that comes to my mind often:

My barn having burned down
now I can see the moon.

A more contemporary and Western Christian quote is also helpful, from Rachel Held Evans:

Baptism reminds us that there's no ladder to holiness to climb, no self-improvement plan to follow. It's just death and resurrection, over and over again, day after day, as God reaches down into our deepest graves and with the same power that raised Jesus from the dead wrests us from our pride, our apathy, our fear, our prejudice, our anger, our hurt, and our despair.

I thank all of you for your support. I pray that we take care of ourselves and each other, and if I do not respond or we are not able to move as quickly on our prior plans, I hope you understand. More later.

Leaning into grace,

Wendy