

Epiphany 3 - The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light..... (22/1/2017)

Isaiah 9:1-4; Matthew 4:12-23 (Psalm 27 and

It is a great joy to be with you today....and to get a taster of your life together...

Greetings from your brothers and sisters in Christ in Brussels!

The last 12 months have been very eventful for all of us....

In Brussels we had the March bombings.... the Brexit vote....which has been a major bereavement.....

.....and we just witnessed the inauguration of the 45th president of the United States....

Later this year.... key elections in France, Germany....and the Netherlands.... We could be in for a bumpy ride....

To reflect on these issues in the season of Epiphany following from Christmas is fascinating.....and hope giving!

What contrast this season between darkness and light....

..... between BAD news....and the GOOD News.....

How do we deal with that? How do we hold that together???

Various options are at our disposal....

One can opt for pessimism or cynicism....

That's not too difficultbut it does not really help oneselfor others...

OR... be an escapist... :-)

We withdraw to our cosy bubbles of warmth and light.... for a day or two.... and just forget about it all....

Certainly a good short term fix...I did just after Christmas....it was wonderful..... but it does not resolve anything either...

OR....we are reasonable....we choose middle ground...

...holding both the good and the bad... keeping things in perspective...

Counting our blessings yes..... but what about all that darkness??

All these strategies are all too familiar...God does none of them.....God does something completely different....

The Good news we heard at Christmas is that....

Light shines in the darkness....and the darkness has not overcome it....

God ENTERS the darkness.... God ENTERS our struggles.... our suffering.....and death...

The Word became flesh and dwelled among us....

Godthe Creator of the universe.... decides.....to become.... ONE OF US.... Jesus..... The Lord SAVES.....

Not just to show solidarity....***I will just be with you in darkness for a bit...***

Jesus ENTERS our darkness....in order to TRANSFORM it....

As in our reading today.....a reading that features in both Christmas and Epiphany.... Isaiah 9 vs 2

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined.

It is important to remember that Isaiah spoke these words of hope in times a great crisis for the people of Judah...

In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,

The land of Zebulun and Naphtali.... always was the first entry point of enemies attacking from the North.... enemies like Assyria....and Babylon.....

This region that had seen so much death and destruction.... would also be the first region to see the glory of God....

.....but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

In Matthew 4 this passage is applied to Jesus....the Christ....

The PROPHECTIC readings we heard this season... are all about God's big hope....God's big mission... despite DARK TIMES...

...not only for Israel.....but for all the nations....

Note by the way that vs 5.... a verse that is often left out in Carol Service readings.... refers to the aftermath of war.....

For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire.

before we get to that glorious verse 6....

***For to us a child is born, to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,***

Biblical scholar Tom Wright says that when Jesus read such prophecies..... Jesus saw his 'job description'

.....Jesus KNEW that role was for him....that he wasthe MESSIAH.... the long awaited....anointed One.....who is also the suffering servant who would bring salvation to the ends of the earth....

One example from our reading last week Isaiah 49..... Also about being THE LIGHT.....

***I will give you as a light to the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.'***

Jesus himself would say...

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (Jn. 8:12 ESV)

and in Matthew 5....to his followers....

"YOU are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. (Matt. 5:14 ESV)

This is about cross and resurrection.... and the spread of the Gospel....and the renewal of all things....

Jesus knew HE was the LIGHT....and that HIS LIGHT would be visible in his FOLLOWERS....

He also knew that before bringing salvation would reach the ends of the earth.... He really had to ENTER THE DARKNESS....

[Jesus had great HOPES.... HE also was very realistic.....]

Jesus was born in a world of great violence...and darkness..

Jesus and his family had to flee the violence.....and became....refugees....

....all small boys in Bethlehem were killed...

Jesus himself would die a horrible death...on the cross....

Jesus really descended into darkness....

The evening before Jesus died... he spoke to his friends about everything that was to happen

And he concluded like this....**John 16:33 (NLT)**

I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me.

....may have peace IN ME....

Jesus says that only IN HIM....will we know true peace....

...and then he said....

Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart.... I have overcome the world."

God does not deny evil.... God does not....

Darkness is confronted with light.... the glory of JESUS....full of GRACE and TRUTH.....

Death and darkness were not able to hold Jesus....!!

Actually....one day...all darkness and death....will be swallowed up by light and life!!

Behold.... I make everything new!!..... that is the vision!

HOW DOES THAT BECOME REALITY???

All of humanity is invited to turn to the light.... so that we become light bearers ourselves.....in a dark world....

Last week...the Gospel invitation was.... **COME AND SEE....**

This week... Jesus says.... **FOLLOW ME....**

When we meet Jesus.... lives are changed forever....

In Jesus....we come face to face with God... His LOVE.... GRACE
...truth....and PURPOSE....

When we turn to Jesus....the Light of the world...Christ is born in us.... light of the world....

[As Erasmus said: ***Give light....and the darkness will disappear of itself...***]

We are not to give in to darkness.... or ignore it....

We are called to confront it....in grace and truth.....

We have to bring God's light... wherever God has placed us...

Martin Luther King, Jr. said.....

Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that.

Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.

And yes... they were unfinished.....works in progress... we all are....

.....jars of clay..... YET..... holding the glorious treasure..... Christ being formed in us.....

We live with many challenges ourselves... We live in a world that can be so dark... YET.... we may believe....that ***LIGHT shone in the darkness.... and the darkness did not overcome the light....***

We know that following Jesus resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit..... the life-giving message of Jesus went out in all the earth.... the growth of the Church....

Light of the world.... Salvation to the end of the earth.....

HOW did that happen?....and how DOES it happen?

Jesus says....***FOLLOW ME.....***

Being with Jesus.....to become more like Jesus.....to do the things Jesus did.....in the way he did them.....

It always goes back to OUR own ENCOUNTER.....with the living God....

**I think all this is very well reflected in your values.... UP IN
OUT....**

Worship and Prayer....

Deep Community and Discipleship...

Service and Evangelism....

By the GRACE of GOD....This is how faith grows....This is how the
church growth....In a world that desperately needs light....

***The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has
shined.***

In this place....at this time....Jesus calls you to follow him....and be
that light...

Jesus calls you to be the hope....of the world....

AMEN

Paul Vrolijk / Amersfoort 22 January 2017