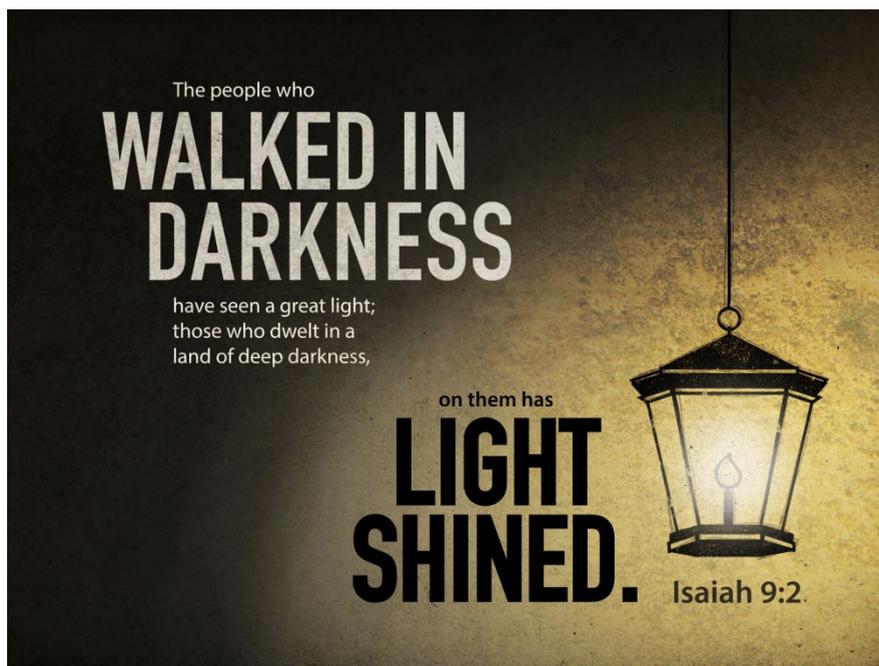


Light in the darkness: He gives light. He calls us to share light.

Third Sunday of Epiphany, January 26th 2020.

Isaiah 9:1-7; Matthew 4:12-25.



You know, there is game, an icebreaker, you may have used it. Perhaps you really don't these ones. What object would you choose to describe yourself. Now, I don't want to ask, but perhaps consider that - for the extroverts, you go it; for the more introverted, this doesn't give enough time...

You can share that over coffee... Good community builder one!

Jesus is described as a light. He moves to Capernaum. By Sea of Galilee. That fulfils part of Isaiah 9. "Galilee of the Gentiles, the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned." Isaiah 9 is

an example - how it is written in Hebrew - of *the prophetic past* - these future events are described in the past tense - because they are as good as done. Isaiah writes down in faith what God is going to do. He, a light, **will** dawn, those in darkness **will see** a great light. It is sure.

Zechariah said in the Benedictus (luke 1) as he praised the future role of his son, John the Baptist: "the tender mercy of our God by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven, to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace." v78-79.

The words of Isaiah came originally at a time when those in the north of the country were in darkness and faced defeat, oppression, occupation, problems with the Assyrian empire. However, it is promised, they will be the first to receive the Messiah's light. And Jesus ministry begins in Galilee, the Messiah, the Promised King, has come.

Matthew describes the ministry of Jesus - how that light has dawned on the people in Galilee.

How does *he light*? He preaches the same message as John, "repent, for the kingdom of heaven - the kingdom of God - has come near." There are plenty of lives, plenty of books or biographies, where people write how they were in personal darkness, due to their lifestyles, and they saw who Jesus was - they saw him as Lord and Saviour, they became aware of their sin, their need for forgiveness, which was only possible through the cross on which Jesus died. And they repented and accepted what Jesus had done. They turned around and turned to Him and knelt at the cross. Light came into their lives, and as the light flooded their lives, it poured out to others, families, friends, wives, husbands...

Light came in through repentance of those who had lived in very dark places.

But I'd suggest Matthew doesn't only have repentance in mind, when he says 'light has dawned.' He describes how Jesus goes to synagogues and teaches, he goes and proclaims. He doesn't wait for the crowds to come to him - though they do come to him, we hear, from all over the area, from Syria, and from Jerusalem and Judea. He goes. The light isn't for the selected few. It is like he goes into a house. But he doesn't switch on one light in one room and stay there. No he went through the whole house, switching on light and light... now how people responded to that light is another issue. But the light was *for all*, intended for all.

And the light dawned through actions of power and compassion. Disease and illness is healed. Those with severe pain. Demon possessed liberated. Those with seizures and paralysed. Healed. People who were experiencing darkness in different personal ways - emotional, spiritual, physical. Light dawned upon them.

Jesus in John 8:12 declared: "I am the light of the world, whoever follows me, will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

"The people living in darkness have seen a great light, on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." Those verses want me to say to the Lord - Lord you are the light of the world, and I choose to put my hand in yours, trusting, light will shine in my dark times and suffering, because you promised it would. When David wrote Psalm 23, he said 'your rod and your staff - rod for protection, staff to guide - they comfort me, when I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

God loves us and cares for us in our suffering. I find I come back to two things which strengthen my faith in this. I come back to a Saviour - who was crucified, risen, Lord. That the Word made Flesh - he didn't escape the cross - but took all the cross gave - he suffered and kept those wounds on his risen ascended body. When he returns, he will bear those marks still. After the Second World War, a German theologian Jurgen Moltmann commented on this truth about God - he pointed to this aspect of God, that he is a Suffering God - was needed for people to somehow connect to God, to begin to feel God understood, after millions had died in the previous years. Not a distant God, but one who understood the pain, horror, darkness. The crucified God. And he pointed to a Trinitarian view of the Cross. We think of Trinity at the baptism - Father speaks, the Spirit comes down, the Son is baptised, praying, in the water. At the Cross, the Son is crucified. The Father, turns his face away. Due to our sin. But the Father suffered the loss of a son. The Son died, the Father suffered the loss of a perfectly truly beloved son. Our God understands suffering and loss.

And secondly, I'm encouraged by two passages: John 11 & Romans 8's last verses. Romans 8 is well known. John 11 is about the resurrection of Lazarus. How this helps me, is Jesus allows the two friends - we are his friends too he said - to say - Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died. He allows them to question, to say what is on their heart. He listens. I believe as I wrestle with God in loss, we can speak our heart...

He grieves. He cries. The Word made flesh cries. He knows he will raise Lazarus He cries at the pain of their loss. He knows where our loved ones - children, sisters, fathers, mothers - he knows where they are, who fell asleep in Christ, he knows the glorious future that they come to when raised, with fixed healed bodies and minds that will not die, and he knows, today they are with him in paradise. Yet he grieves with us. It is striking that Paul, when teaching what a Jesus shaped life looks like, calls the Christians in

Rome - Jew and Gentile - rejoice with those who rejoice, mourn with those who mourn. We are to, because the Lord does. And death matters to the Lord. He does not answer why Lazarus died in that way. We see instead *Jesus angry* - at a world, which was not what was intended, a world which was intended instead to be a place where people grow old and old, not sickness, no cancer. And he will in time make all things new.

And so I place my hand in his. Death matters to him, my grief matters to him, he is not indifferent. He understands suffering. And I trust his light to shine into my life, others lives, when we are in darkness. In ways I may expect or ways I may not.

This week we remember particularly the Holocaust as it is 75 years since the liberation of Auschwitz. Corrie Ten Boom, was sent to Ravensbruck concentration camp, which was 50 miles from Berlin, because her family hid Jews in Haarlem. Corrie, in a book I am reading, talked about two things. She talked about being in the prison camp with her sister Betsie. She said that the camp roll call was very early in bitterly cold weather. Sometimes, she said they would be sent out too early. She continues: "Then we would take a chance and walk quietly around camp. Everything was black. There was no light anywhere.

In that cold blackness, Betsie and I walked with the Lord, and talked with the Lord. Betsie said something. I said something. Then the Lord said something. How? I don't know but we both understood what he said. That was a little bit of heaven in the midst of hell. After those words, she wrote the words of Jesus : 'I am with you always to the end of the world.' She then shares another example. "Once, while we were on roll call, a cruel guard kept us standing for a long, long time. Suddenly a skylark began to sing in the sky. And all the prisoners looked up to listen to that bird's song. As I looked at the bird I saw the sky, and I thought of

Psalm 103:11. 'O Love of God, how deep and great, far deeper than man's deepest hate.'

God sent that skylark daily for three weeks, exactly during roll call, to turn our eyes from the cruelty of men to the ocean of his love."
(Corrie Ten Boom, *Each New Day*, pp30-31)

When I thought about what Corrie wrote, it reminded me of one of my favourite films, *Shawshank Redemption*. If you haven't seen it. Recommended. Set in a prison. Criminals who have been there for years. One of the characters - Andy - in the warden's office - by permission as his prison job - puts on an piece by Mozart, from the *Marriage of Figaro* - Duetto Sull Aria. And then he broadcasts it to the prisoners. One of Andy's friends, a fellow prisoner, Red - says:

"I have no idea to this day what those two Italian ladies were singing about. Truth is, I don't wanna know. Somethings are best left unsaid. ... I tell you those voices soared higher and farther than anyone in a grey place dares to dream. It was like some beautiful bird flapped into our drab little cage and made those walls dissolve away. And for the briefest of moments, every last man in *Shawshank* felt free."

One further phrase from Corrie - she said, there is "no pit so deep, that God is not deeper still..." Scripture promises those times, when in the darkness, there is a bit of heaven, the love of God is shown, light dawns. We choose to place our trust in him.

More briefly. He calls. In the midst of Jesus ministry, beginning in Galilee. He calls disciples to follow him - Peter, Andrew, James and John. He says he will make them fishers of people. Each of us - as followers, have a SHAPE you could say - we have our Spiritual Gifts, we have our Passions, whats on our heart, we have our abilities our strengths, we have our personality and we have our experience through life. That Shape is no accident. Some of that

SHAPE comes through personal suffering with personal losses or struggles. Yet the Lord brings good out of bad, out of suffering, to shape something within us for his purposes and his people later. Perhaps to enable us to help people in a similar situation later, or simply to have empathy with them... As 2 Cor 1 shares, to comfort others in their afflictions with the comfort we have received from the Lord. The Lord invites us, whatever our SHAPE, to be involved in his work. In fact to reflect and shine his light.

When the disciple group is larger. He, on a hill looking out to the Sea of Galilee, will declare and describe the Kingdom lifestyle - which is known as the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7). And in that set of connected teachings, Jesus, the Light of the World, will say - 'You are the light of the world.' As he brings light, we are to bring light. The gospel message to go out, to serve those and pray with those and for those, in the power of the Spirit, who suffer illness, demonic possession, severe pain and all the sufferings described in our Gospel. To bring light into the darkness that people suffer emotional, spiritually or physically. In short, you bring the message of the kingdom to others, you do the works of the kingdom and you show the compassion of the kingdom - the message of the king, the works of the king, the compassion of the king.

Through you, and not just by the Lord directly, he seeks to have his light dawn upon others. You are the ones who can bring the touch, the words, the presence of Jesus to those who suffer...

He gives light in darkness. He calls you also to shine his light.

Let's be still...